Sulfur 24

featuring

JACKSON MAC LOW GARY SNYDER RON SILLIMAN

KUSANO SHIMPEI JOSE LEZAMA LIMA DAVID BROMIGE

JED RASULA KARIN LESSING GERDA MEYER BERNSTEIN

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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 (telephone: 313/483-9787). Subscriptions are $12 (2 issues) for individuals, $17 for institutions; a single copy is $7. Current issue is Vol. IX, #1. Foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $2 for book rate mail, $8 for air mail postage. Make checks to SULFUR in U.S. currency. Back issues (except #1) are available. CLAIMS FOR MISSING NUMBERS can be honored only within 3 months after publication. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN #: 0730-305X.

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DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN
TYPESETTING BY LAZERTYPE, SANTA ROSA, CA

SPRING 1989

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: THORPE FEIDT / THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH
(The Ambiguities 207–211, for Gerrit Lansing). 1987, acrylic on canvas, 39" x 61".

1989 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

SULFUR : imagination as an instrument
in change.
"Holy water — sulfur thedor"
By means of sulfur essential
changes take place.
When things stink, something
important is going on,
something *sulfuric* :
putrefaction
change in material life
oily, floating, light stuff.

Where is sulfur to be found?
(Jung Vol. 14)
motif factor in consciousness
The Push
—the principle of combustibility
—catches fire & explodes
without it, no fire.
If things aren't moving— lack of sulfur?

Hinders sublimations—
(for it is a compulsion,
a driver, doesn't want
to be deviated — seeks
its ongoing drive—)

the spirit that is innate
& drives it to change .

Kramer : 14th century . Where to be
found? In all substances,
metals, trees, herbs, animals,
stones . Where anything
flares up — an odor a color
There is an attraction —
sulfur — where desire appears.

Wherever the interest is— a devil
ready to catch fire.
lurking everywhere .
the desirousness of life.

Why do we need it?
An essential ingredient in the
goal of the work— the philosopher stone.

Compulsions enable movement .
We undervalue the desire . the urge.
thank god for compulsions —
tame them with precision
the green drive the Green Lion
has to be tamed .

The paws are cut off.

orexis = stretching out,
cutting off appetite —
not in Lion's heart but in its reach —

Who cuts the paws off? If "I" or
will does, it is sulfur vs. sulfur.

alternative : *the vesseling of the*
Lion = experiencing that
need fully (then the paws *fall off)*

[indulgence in the ***need*** rather
than focus on the ***demand***.]

The *whitening* of the *sulfur*

*

Alchemy called sulfur the fat of the
earth — it gives
life & color to everything
There is an unctuous, oily, making
things possible, a flowing, in
sulfur. All things are on
fire — all things can
shine, all things are
anointed

sulfur boils
salt eats
acid bites

(baptism in oil
fat figure of the Buddha)

Crucial that sulfur be present
throughout the work. (otherwise
it is saturnian, dry — mercurial,
dry.)
Albertus Magnus : "first
boil sulfur in a strong acid for
a whole day"

[Notes taken by Clayton Eshleman
during James Hillman's two-day seminar
on Alchemy, Los Angeles, 1985]

JACKSON MAC LOW

60TH LIGHT POEM:

IN MEMORIAM ROBERT DUNCAN
8–9 OCTOBER 1988

"Radiation"'s ambiguous—*we*'re ambivalent—
weighted toward horror—
: hardly hear "radiance"

Not *gemütlich* owl-light—*blinding* light—
evanescent light like ours—us—ah!
ugh!

Reflected light: tolerable light—
only the crazy look at the sun minutes—hours
no, it *don't* strengthen the eyes Mr. Yogi!

Dreamy dreamlight—refuge from *un*doing, *un*making light. . .
Northern Lights—hah!—swirling i'th'empyrean—yick!
we know what makes 'em tick!

Tock!
talk!
callous callous callous light careless light ach!

Cursed with a serious curse—oogh!—
a discombobulating videocameraman—
glowed like tungsten giving verse voice—oh!

Aurora borealis swooping i'th'bloody empyrean—hm?
i'th'ionosphere's E region—*ja?*—particle rain
from outer magnetosphere, mostly electrons—heh?

Seemed to be puttin' on a show for the hicks from Chicago
but Robert Frost *was* a fairybaiter—yuck!—
how did *he* know?

Northern Lights—*more* Northern Lights!
them rays!
all say oo! 'n' ah! seein' 'em slip 'n' slide

Took over the floor and gave voice—whew!
flared every *which* way—anger—ecstasy—eros—
the ol'-time sublime, eh Longinus?

'N' silly silly silliness, hebephrenic silliness, eh doc?
muck! 'n' fuck! 'n' suck! 'n' fuck! 'n' muck!
sudden sweetness, edge of oblivion, gone

Gone
gone
gone

Gone
gone
gone

Gone
gone
gone

Not the end—
Grandma brought Hermes Trismegistus to the West
in a covered wagon. . .

8–9 October 1988
New York

GARY SNYDER

A SET OF PATH POEMS

HOW POETRY COMES TO ME

It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light

OFF THE TRAIL

for Carole

We are free to find our own way
Over rocks—through the trees—
Where there are no trails. The ridge and the forest
Present themselves to our eyes and feet
Which decide for themselves
In their old learned wisdom of doing,
Where the wild will take us. We have
Been here before. It's more intimate somehow
Then walking the paths that lay out some route
That you stick to,
All paths are possible, many will work,
Being blocked is its own kind of pleasure,
Getting through is a joy, the side-trips
And detours show down logs and flowers,
The deer paths straight up, the squirrel tracks
Across, the outcroppings lead us on over.
Resting on treetrunks,
Stepping out on the bedrock, angling and eyeing
Both making choices—now parting our ways—
And later rejoin; I'm right, you're right,
We come out together. *Mattake,* "Pine Mushroom,"
Heaves at the base of a stump. The dense matted floor
Of Red Fir needles and twigs. This is wild!
We laugh, wild for sure,
Because no place is more than another,
All places total,
And our ankles, knees, shoulders &
Haunches know right where they are.
Recall how the *Dao De*
Jing puts it: the trail's not the way.
No path will get you there, we're off the trail,
You and I, and we chose it! Our trips out of doors
Through the years have been practice
For this ramble together,
Deep in the mountains
Side by side,
Over rocks, through the trees.

RIGHT IN THE TRAIL

Here it is, near the house,
A **big** pile, fat scats,
Studded with those deep red
Smooth-skinned manzanita berries,
Such a pile! Such droppings,
Awesome. And I saw how
The young girl in the story,
Had good cause to comment
On the bearscats she found while
Picking blueberries with her friends.
She laughed at them
Or maybe **with** them, jumped over them
(Bad luck!), and is reported
To have said "wide anus!"
To amuse or annoy the Big Brown Ones
Who are listening, of course.

They say the ladies
Have always gone berrying
And they all join together
To go out for the herring spawn,
Or to clean green salmon.
And that big set of lessons
On what bears really want,
Was brought back by the girl
Who made those comments:
She was taken on a year-long excursion
Back up in the mountains,
Through the tangled deadfalls,
Down into the den.
She had some pretty children by a
Young and handsome Bear.

Now I'm on the dirt
Looking at these scats
And I want to cry not knowing why
At the honor and the humor
Of coming on this sign

That is not found in books
Or transmitted in letters,
And is for women just as much as men,
A shining message for all species,
A glimpse at the Trace
of the Great One's passing,
With a peek into her whole wild system—
And what was going on last week,
(Mostly still manzanita)—

Dear Bear: do stay around. Be good.
And though I know
It won't help to say this,

Chew your food.

Kitkitdizze X.88

ON CLIMBING THE SIERRA MATTERHORN AGAIN AFTER THIRTY-ONE YEARS

Range after range of mountains
Year after year after year.
I am still in love.

on the summit, 4 X 40086

RON SILLIMAN

from "TONER"

Brucebook

igloo ice bucket used as lunch pail
stare
checking out panty lines
through the rich knits
notepad
conceived as contact sheet
see nouns as glossies

command mode
small boy asks
where's my hair
inner alarm rings
long before clock radio
's soothing whisper starts
cheap jeans bear loud stitching

wear low on the hips
shirt half tucked to reveal belly
first orange light
hard against the hills
reflected in a million windows
forced air hand dryer
next to

disemboweled towel dispenser
old orange cab
ringed with grime
t-shirt as display ad bears logo
to increase name recognition
goosebumps
on her thighs beneath miniskirt

on her way to high school
tricolor
pom-pom juts from gym bag
cash for contras exceeds sum sought
shoe town
black bird perched
atop tombstone twists

head stuck on song *here*
comes the night
oh
here it comes
yeah
kid on the A-train
looking for action

our infrastructure is old
and cannot be replaced
man asleep

on bench built
for three
is barely twenty
ornate midtown graveyard

how quickly graffiti style
degenerates
coarse Kosher salt
in bright yellow box
two eggs turn opaque
sizzling
atop smooth industrial griddle

rain on the river
blurs view of Jersey
red-grey brick sky
early to bed
early to rise
work like a dog
and advertise

still air makes mind sleepy
even in sunlit room
ceiling black with street soot
in spite of
jammed windows
siren yips
at intersection only

old Hasids
in dark coats
on a hot day
the young
appear the most foreign
suitcase full of diamonds
on 47th street

wise men fish here
but cannot find books
amid chaos
of intuited order
subjective
in negative sense only
phlegm of the personal

someone's cooking popcorn
and whole building knows it
while outside
jackhammers on Mott St.
vibrate teeth
bicycles on fire escape
high over brick courtyard

old wire shopping cart
turns to rust

on a rooftop
it's daytime
tie sheet-curtains into knots
the way flowers clutch at filtered light
now put answering machine on playback

imagine 50% more 9 oz. bonus size
life is really special
bright
as an all-night market
hum
in motor of big truck
over long arc of bridge

hands are as mind is
chapped
conversation is friction
the way voice shakes skull
nostrils produce
constant sinus mucous
pick to flick away

Jaws
p.o.v. shark
fence forms a windbreak
against which to lean
hummingbird to the fuchsia

shadow
that darts

curl fingers to shelter palm
thumb makes a clasp
violets in their purple bloom"
hummingbird rises
like a copter
vertical
over pruned apple tree

slow a little, planet
people are sleeping
silver,
the train into work
slips into the earth
becomes
subway shining in the dark

good grief
is literally true
beautiful broker
appears depressed
tho on best dressed list
only modesty is false
how the wilt becomes the flower

I cry
to see the captains of poetry
dead at the wheel
exhaust hose spirals
up
into truck's cabin
incredibly clear afternoon

give 'em enough trope
hallelujah
bum again
a match in exscription
as literal
lights on
behind the drawn shade

lines mark the eyes' part
but i hear sounds
whistling in skull cavern
escalator rolls
steadily down
at checkers plead
don't king me

young blond red-faced man
features already wine-swollen
drums
a tune out on his hard plastic

attaché
fingering as if typing
seat on a crowded train

neptune society price list
something to consider
Eisenhower
learned not to convey ambition
blank slate of drive-in screen
collapsing
in dry weedy field

tiny flags on hill
simulate poppies
as possible art piece
offshore, by context
hidden in the head
bagel made of raisin bread
forms a base for cream cheese

tiny ducks
on the wide river
under the iron bridge
a collector
of aluminum cans
is tall and thin
peers into the trash receptacle

orange-footed mallard male
pecks at a finch
girl
shells peanuts before she eats 'em
this man's mismatched socks
match his
shirt and shorts

pass for power
quarterback's creed
well as the white-faced mime's
lollipop trees bagged in plastic
any rhythm defi(n)es sentiment
when will this pen
come to life

transit's glory is another story
false
white sun shimmers in the solid sky
passport photos
while U wait
bag lady in a football helmet
bus stalled on the steep hill

pulp mouth
point at which
Novocaine wears down
even this milkshake

tastes "warm"
vanilla
up against the new crown

blimp stalks the gray air
cloud heavy
a wet heat
is better than dry heaves
as ashen as the earth
poor retch
dog taught to fetch

and the salmon flower
is pink
but the fruit of the poor salmon
is caviar to eat
echoes
in the head's hollow heard
herds words into song

not the same as thought
thinking
but if to write is to listen
as to ride is to sit on
accelerator, break, wheel
it's the will is what
does not break

femme de la creme
safety pin
closes up blouse
where top button should be—
rash beneath watchband
white tennies
beneath long black skirt

old emphysemic wheezes at coffee bar
never use lemon in tea at home
into her 40s
still see the girl
wide-eyed
under that flesh
the one with the jelly center

moisture gathers
on the outside
of the glass of ice water
while beside it that
of the tall vanilla shake
tho cool
is dry

a thin white see-thru blouse
but with a cheap bra beneath
point at which heat
erases

not just sense of decorum
but also
desire

banking district empty by dusk
puppy chained to the bag lady's cart
pull tag
ripped flag
lone dove amid these pigeons
muzak
seeping from highrise walls

line trash bags in a row beside boxes
jewelry shop's windows empty at night
red light pulses
index of caution
office interiors illumined within
oh loungers await
the airport bus

LET'S OVERPRAISE THE PAST
SO WE CAN BE DONE WITH IT
ILLEGIBLE
DAY-PLANNER NOTATION
PUCKER
TO SUCK ON
HAND-ROLLED CIGARETTE

BACK SIDE OF A STOP SIGN
BEFORE WHICH
DOUBLE-DECKER BUS
MATTED HAIR OF A STREET DRUNK
TATTOOS
RIPPLE OVER HANGING FLESH
BROKEN ESCALATOR BOARDED UP

I AM SPEAKING IN FRENCH
BROWN SHOES
BUT NOT A PAIR
BUTTONS JUST FOR POCKETS
HOT TEA
WON'T QUENCH THIRST
WATCH SITS ATOP THE TABLE

IS THAT MY BREATH
TREBLE
PITCHED TO THE MAX
THUS AIR ECHOES IN SKULL
BROUGHT ON BY SUBTITLES
ARTICLES
ARE PURE EXCESS

AXES
RENDER JUGGLING "REAL"
CROSS LEGS
TRIANGULATE LAP

GLOVED BULB IS MICROPHONE
SOCKS TO BUFFER FOOT IN SHOE
DUCT TAPE TAMES WIRE

ENORMOUS SOUND OF SCRATCHING EAR
EROTIC
AS A Q-TIP
GLAZED SUGAR BREAKS OFF DONUT
PIPE JUTS THROUGH SHEETROCK
HARD EDGE
OF AN OLD FOOT

HARSH DRY DAYS ON WHICH
POETRY IS AS PLEASANT
AS POKING A ROAD KILL
WITH A STICK
PEN POINT
DAMP IN THE WARM
ORGAN GOO

MUSIC DISORDERS PERCEPTION
UNTIL NEW FORM EMERGES
SQUIRREL'S AGE
BY THE RINGS
ON ITS TAIL
ROUGE OVER
LIGHT FRECKLES UPON PALE SKIN

SWEAT'S SALT
STAINS THE SHIRT
WHITE HOUSES DOT THE FAR HILLS
SPOTS INTERRUPTING
A THICKER GREEN
CLOUDY CENTER TO CUBE OF ICE
SOUND OF HAMMER PULLING NAIL

BUT THAT OF THE MANUAL TYPEWRITER
IS FORGOTTEN NOW
DEEP ROUND KEYS
TRAFFIC COPTER BUZZES PAST
BEES AT THE LIP
OF THE RED FUCHSIA
DOG YAPPING SO FAR AWAY

EACH DAY'S AN INVENTION
CONTINUITY BUT MEMORY'S FICTION
FIVE FINGERS
ON EVERY HAND
IS GENERAL PRINCIPLE
AUTOS STALLED
IN MIDTOWN JAM

PEN MOCKS THE PAGE
MIND AT DAWN DREAM-CROWDED
CROW ON THE LAMP POST
HAWKS

SUN
    BREAKS IN THE PRISM
SCATTERS ON KITCHEN WALL

EROSION SCOOPS THE HILL
WEIGHT OF THE SATCHEL
                CONCEALS
RED MARBLEIZED BOWLING BALL
PAR COURSE BENEATH BART TRACKS
                WOMAN SORTS COUPONS
LIKE A POKER HAND

TEDDY RUXPIN REVERSIBLE
HAND PUPPETS NAMED
                THIS
THAT
    THE OTHER
TIE LIKE A PHALLUS HANGS LIMP
FROM OPEN BUTTONED-DOWN COLLAR

PAPER ROSE IN SILVER GOBLET
WOMAN PULLING ON CORK
TO CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE
WITH BARE TEETH
                TELESCOPE
SQUINTED INTO
                THE WRONG WAY

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO
SPEAK
TO DRIVER
WHILE TEXT IS
IN OPERATION
WAFFLE'S GRID ON TWO AXES
STRAWBERRIES TO THE NORTHEAST

SMALL PLANE LANDS IN RED SQUARE
DARK CLOUD OVER SKYLIGHT
ARCHITECT
BROWSES A CITY
BEACH
IS TRANSITIONAL
SAND FORMS THE MARGIN

EARRING WORN AT TOP OF EAR
IGNORE
THE IMPERATIVES
OF THIS TEXT
BENT PIPE
CURVES INTO FRAME OF CHAIR
HYPHEN IN ANN-MARGRET

PEOPLE DESPISE EXACTITUDE
FOR WHICH THERE IS NO GROUND
SECOND THOUGHT
LAST THOUGHT

ANKLES TEND TO BE REDDER
BLUE STOOL
IN WHITE BOWL

IN ADJECTIVES
VAGUENESS IS NOT
MYSTERY
CHINESE WORD
IS NOT LETTERING
PIGEONS PROWL THE MALL LOT
IN SERVICE CORRIDOR FIREMEN CRUNCH

REALISM =
WORDS IN SITU
ROOTS CROWDED IN TINY POT
AIRPLANE TACKED INTO SKY
PREPOSITIONS
PRIMITIVE VELCRO
ROADS CURVE IN "THE COUNTRY"

AND THEN WENT DOWN TO THE CARPORT
SET KEY
TO ICETRAY
FOURTH IN A FIVE TEAM LEAGUE
THE UMLAUT SHOULD BE CENTERED
IN
FROM U'S VERTICALS

SLICE
SAYS THE BLIMP
SOFTCORE
BY O-RINGS
HIDDEN IN THE MANIFOLD
EYE EYE EYE
WHAT FACE CAPITAL Y

MISTOOK THAT DOVE FOR AN OWL
YOU CAN HEAR
BALL-BEARINGS
INSIDE A SKATEBOARD
YOU CAN
TELL WHEN THE TRAIN'S IN
BY THE CROWD ALL AT ONCE

ON THE ESCALATOR DOWN
THEN
BY THE LOT'S END SUDDENLY
YOU'RE ALONE
HERE
MOON HIGH OVER THE SUPERMARKET
BEFORE THE IN-ROLLING FOG

CHEAP PLASTIC BRIEFCASE
CONFERENCE SOUVENIR
BEGINS
TO CRACK WITHIN A WEEK

SPECIAL CLIPPERS FOR TOENAILS
EMERY BOARD'S
SUBTLE SURFACE

ODD GLASSES
ONLY THE LOWER
CRESCENTS PRESENT
WAXED FLOSS
PASSES BETWEEN PLANES OF TEETH
RACIAL FORMATION IN THE NBA
GREEN PLASTIC DRAFTSMAN'S TEMPLATE

FIRST THEY COME FOR THE BROCCOLI
AND THEN THEY COME FOR US
WIRES PULL
THE PHONE POLL UP
ARBITRARY CODICITY ON THE DISK
LIKE SALIVA
ON YOUR CHIN

POINT AT WHICH
THE INSIDE
OF TENNIS SHOES BEGIN
TO DISSOLVE
SWEET TASTE
DISTINCT TO CANNED PEAS
BETRAYS RESTAURANT'S BROTH

WHAT IF THE COURSE OF HISTORY
WERE THE FAILURE OF NECESSITY
BIRDS SETTING DOWN ON THE EMPTY FEEDER
TWO KINDS
OF NUDITY
FRONTAL
AND PARTIAL

WHITE WOODFRAME HOUSE
BEHIND TALL CACTUS GARDEN
BRIGHT RED
CHINESE HEADLINES
UPON THE THINNEST OF PAPERS
BELT WORN
WITH HOLSTER'S SLANT

AT THE UNNAMED
LOCATE
AN IMPOSSIBLE HORIZON
BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
SMALL TOOL
THIS FUNCTION
NOT IMMEDIATELY EVIDENT

SKIN DRY ON FOREHEAD
ITCHES
BUT FOR BAND OF OIL
WHERE I WEAR MY HAT

UNTIL THE PUS FORMS
LITTLE MOUNDS
PERFECTLY WHITE

STRUCTURE AS PARANOIA
SPREADS
ROLLED FLAT OVER CHEESECLOTH
RAINBOW WINDKITE BANGS
HARDWOOD PORCH IS AN ADD-ON
BILLOWING CHINS
SWAMP NECK

GROUNDCOVER SMOTHERS STONE
PATH
THEM WEEDS I LIKE
ALGAE FORMS RAINWATER SCUM
ALIVE IN OLD BARREL
AS WHEN
ROSES GROW WILD

THE PLAN IS THE PLAN
AN
ARTICLE OF FAITH
CLOTHES THE NOUN
CLOSE
THE SCREEN DOOR
WIRES MAKE VERTICAL NET

PHLEGM DRIPS
FROM THROAT'S CAVERN
I'M JUST NOW SITTING UP
SUN SMEARS THE HORIZON
GREAT THRILL
TO BREAK LINE
BRITTLE AS A BONE

WHY WE CALL THEM BINOCS
NOBODY KNOWS
SHED AT REAR
OF LONG SLOPING YARD
IS AN ENCLOSED LEAN-TO
RED PATCH
ON HUMMINGBIRD'S THROAT

I CARVE THESE LETTERS DEEP
INTO FLESH OVER DOTTED LINE
YOU'LL NEVER SEE
DRIED PULP
MAKES A SURFACE
IS SEWN
INTO BOOK

KARIN LESSING

A WINTER'S DREAM JOURNAL II

I.
Not knowing who speaks
Immobility's mobile image
Between four walls diminishing & refracting
This circle is the world

Star burning watery shape
As one asleep is bent
Why there is when she spilled the night
Savage heart

Something instead of nothing
The world and the light
At the entrance of the cave
The triple echo

An oscillating talisman
Headlong into the maze
Trying to remember 'eternal truths'
Clouds in the shape of clouds

Like an incandescence
You wear your skin
Phylacteries with figures inscribed
In June all kinds of flowers

As a thing of words
Erased from the center out
The ubiquitous matchstick strokes
Scintillates & retreats & roots

cavatina 1)

The moon tonight
Very simply this time
Minutest grain in the night's beak
Over mirror grass

In earthgrasp, in its own shadow's clasp
The position of the scribe
Quiet imparadised precarious disguise quiet
Native place

(and 2)

Slow slow and stately
Hymns & odes
Engrafted on your heart
The cypresses darkening, sequined

And on their lips
Windows & lamps
Scarce blossom: 'la malicieuse'
The sky constellated fuchsia

• • •

II.
Icons, diaphanous tablets
The throat is filled
As line is flame feeding on flame
Who knows its contour

Their blueness, their cushioned hearts
The shelter of the destitute
As antiphon
As pyrope in penumbra

Scintillates & retreats
This circle these leafgreen steps
A star falls back upon itself
Riverbed grume scutch

Blinding feathery fiery shedding
Resemblances hung in frames
Powdered lake lasts mouchoir
Ridges: trustworthy tenure

Fragments within blocks of fragments
Most ancient site
Sun dips below ruined parapet stumbling
Overflow and stray (children

To the farthest edge of sailing
I who deploys
Distance surpassing tide obliterates
Hard by horizon like a flocculence

In monochrome
Cut engenders rainbow run
Nested in sea-ear, mother of pearl
And added

Who'd travel, cross straits
Winter's salvage in us
In a gaze or was glanced at sideways
Suddenly snowpeaks

(19 February, 1988)

High rooms of departure
A hand is poised
As wheel as water the valley the wind's very *pays*
Rushed on, back through the arms of black algae

In the infinite retrenchment of signs
A living image
They appeared once more in the night
Rings, coins' shining corpse

• • •

III.
Pillar the air almost
And threads, impalpable furrows
Within these precincts
Worlds other ways

The small goods & especially silks store of a language
Suppose you do really dreamspeak
Growing coralline
In which these abound

A kind of excess
Midwinter, winter's bread
Snow flashes and covers the ground late
Its oblique course

In stone in wide in open eyes
Eye argonaut
Between the heart and the throat
Worshipping the light unreasoning reason

The tools, thistles
Time's gold season & place
Your robe of colors, night, the weight & measure
Glittering leaves; visage

Wind-spired as they are stirred
From the barest field
Full flare unravelled sequence
Fathoming finding lodged expiring

In the opposition of steps
Drawing very close
The naked, knotted sounds
In which space in whose shadowy imprint

. . .is swept the soul
Halfway indelible trace
Bright petals the afternoon
Streaming with the earth unaltered, streamed

As if sucked from its shell the sea
I overheard
In the extreme attention of listening
Your sway

Silence itself crystal echoes
The dream the hunt the flame
Beginning dark and standing wave

• • • •

December–March, 1988

CLARK COOLIDGE

IN THE ROOMS OF GUSTON

> "Everyone carries a room around inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round about is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall."
>
> —Franz Kafka

Place this. The room where things, large enough to be close, are stirring an argument. We could discuss "block size" and where would it end us? Behind the saddle thrown over that rack. I know where things live. And no jostling. But a whispering behind the throne. Everything up again.

The outdoors is always indoors. It is a set, a place for fading arrangements, where faults are noted in the bulb and you flush. A trigger waiting for its grapes. Those of us then who can discuss it, dismiss it. Sit down, fool, talk. Back up against the mirror, dream at the field of six moons you did come up with a spike.

I don't choose which, but these are all places to inhabit. Chain something to that chair if you will. Claim responsibility, then carry it around with you. No one else in this closet must be careful. I fought off just those shoes from my thoughts, then put the iron back in the wall.

Then is it a picture? You choose. These things shown on a space that won't exist, come up to speed, accept the evening of the fair hand. But a pit full of some such brings it all up to room.

And this room is a clock that sounds each nail at its edge, in order that the abyss. So who does it stay? Did I forget? Didn't I leave my hand out?

I don't think you can take a place where things only seem. For long, whatever plan, what kind of dodge from strew. All you can say is, In this place they are going. Aloud.

A change of walls. That's all. No one's advantage. No. Whose advantage? Who's calling down all the cards with no white? I am disagreeing with you daily among the loosened things.

An antagonistic paraphernalium? The answer this time is to only walk these boards. As if that *line* were true to all possible picture. And above it, you at the last landing, but sideways in a clear structure of junctures, some standing. I'd have first to light my head. Then the stairway. Put out a ring. Throw fingers. Alarm the enclosure of panthers left out.

I think this is the room they drove to. Somebody's been driving around in here on huge loaf of self, or on vast soft tires. As if in wide times it were avenue. And no thing else brought away from, not a lock.

Caught on this sill, as if the edge of time were the end of town. Even in an open window the buildings on the wall. You can hang it, but will they stay there? Never has any kind of argument taken place here. No boys from any window shine their horn.

When time for a dawn I sat and watched the walls come back. He said, Look, they're still up. Now we can leave them. Now that the backside has joined its reverse in this place. And then even an ocean, and you'll see it's orange. Ponder is your thought then, between the raised stumps.

An elephant, just then in the crack between the bed and slaughter. It's tiny though, could be hoist. Any further plans will up and lead even us out of here. Lend me the last of those lights?

There wasn't much temperature. Still couldn't we catch the blame, keep things overturned till the term set right? This is the place now of pauses. And this is more lingering stuff.

Well, roll that window away if you don't want to leave. There are other crevices, other excuses. All. Just an added detail, that hand you promised to lend me. And stationary, as no line or shock is. Or duck?

Didn't need to be filled, this place of leaps and vaults. What accompanied by what revolved to the end this stuff and left. I caught just the shine. You make up as much as it takes among the black boxes of black, for the judgement.

At just this slant of the room the road had been laked off. Did you come all that way to see? I could make just the master bottle for your eyes. He says, It's a wonder that these pictures don't tip over and run down my leg. Some night one of us will be left staring here and one will.

The blush takes the wall and then how do you subsist in clothes of no color? Behind those cans is where they wash time. These will then be the pictures of something. There is the clock, when all else waits, to throw out.

This is the room that will tell you everything. As long as you don't answer its call. And *no* makes a very long hedge before us to allow this in any. A masking tape the angels of forgettal rely on? Hollow original sections, then bend and yell. The horsemen used to comfort here in the days when you could still borrow them. I titled that theater at the ringing of a bell.

And where is the city of this room? Between ledges, wheels, legs, whatever works, stops. From the bottom too, an elbow raised until you kneel above your head. It's threatening, so much beyond you,

marveling at all the miles of tone it takes. All the heart's weight thought up that thumb's stem.

Downtown is a room, with a cellar on the outside. Gives on a hinge of bricklike outline radiance, perhaps the quitting radiance to wait on, out where they ring tines in picking flat tires. These two wonder what to do with what will always hang out between them. Just between black and red, what? Lots more, slabs of a higher, the color that is all color supposedly none. Then the cow entered backwards and honked in Frigidaire. And we couldn't stop talking waiting for those walls to come back.

Would the subject once admitted stop, or would we be raised from it? These are scratchings no one looks at in wait. How penetrating in mind of anything that adds to your. Iron bars over the transom, the night they spoke.

And the night there was nothing in the center but a twisted radio. Had we been allowed we would have sat around and blamed. Not normal, you know, they really don't allow it, what we've arranged to. Dart in the top of a saucer, watch your left elbow. And what spun the flame, did he say?

There was no entrance. It all began (metal) in a sort of center (gum) where he told me, Just at the point I see it that's the point I finish (weapons in a row) and can leave the room (stand there) a while. And I knocked at that (he sat) and it stood. And they are up (out there) right now looking for the door.

Nobody even raised the name of this room. It doesn't rate one, not even our later mention? Result of which one of us frogged that cigarette from a breed of center everybody for ever after trod a rut around. Then where is the brush? I don't see it. I don't want to, even think to, just use. Now smoke pours from holes in its name.

We didn't call them. They came in anyway. Now we don't know what to call them. We sit in the room, as if smoking them out, and shuffle. Whatever the result, we always leave before they do. It's as if the law were that I leave them there, the cigarettes to work on it.

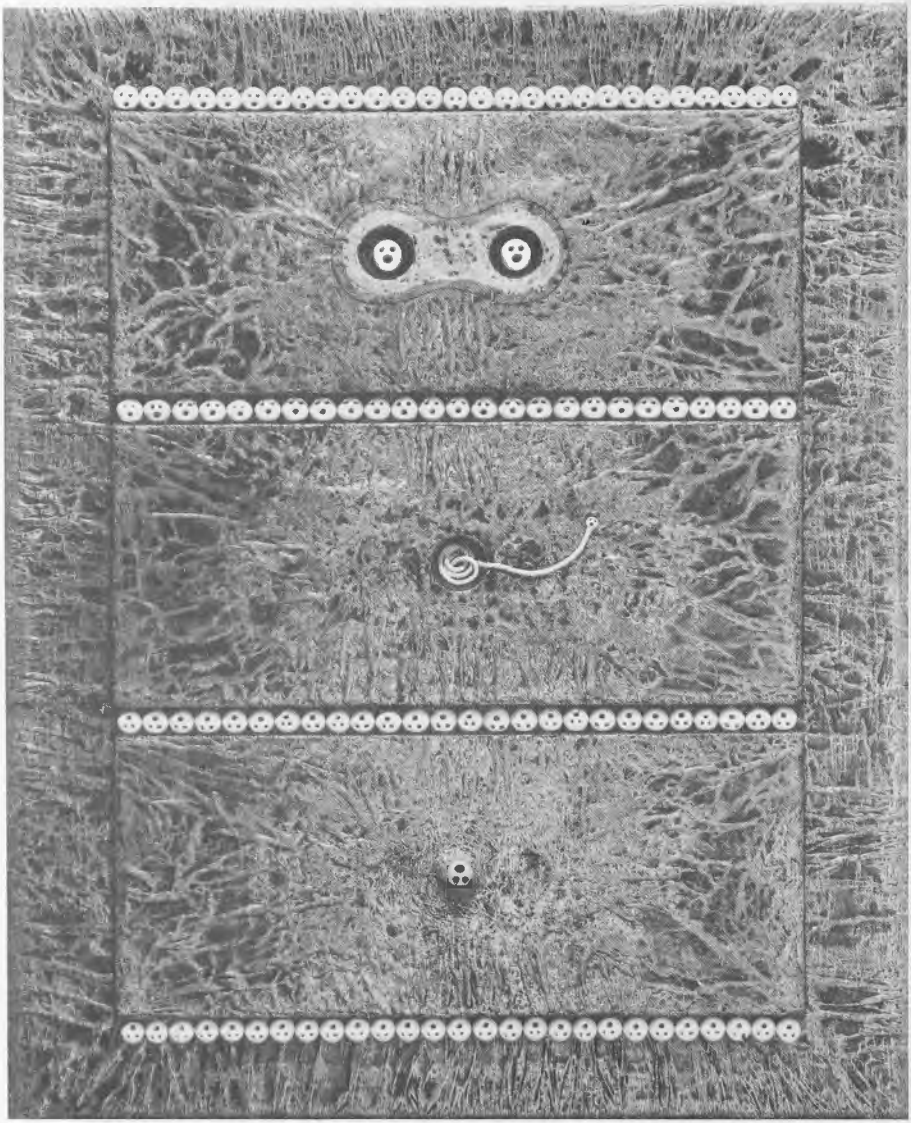
Further then, the knee rooms of carpet, the backyard washline and stuff rooms, the cranky room of Central Avenue, the room where heaps, room of shattered porch, room for the descent to cellars, just enough room for the painter's table on the world.

And at the door near the end, he says, Don't forget to work ever faster. Nothing settles. Never lift the pen.

14IX88

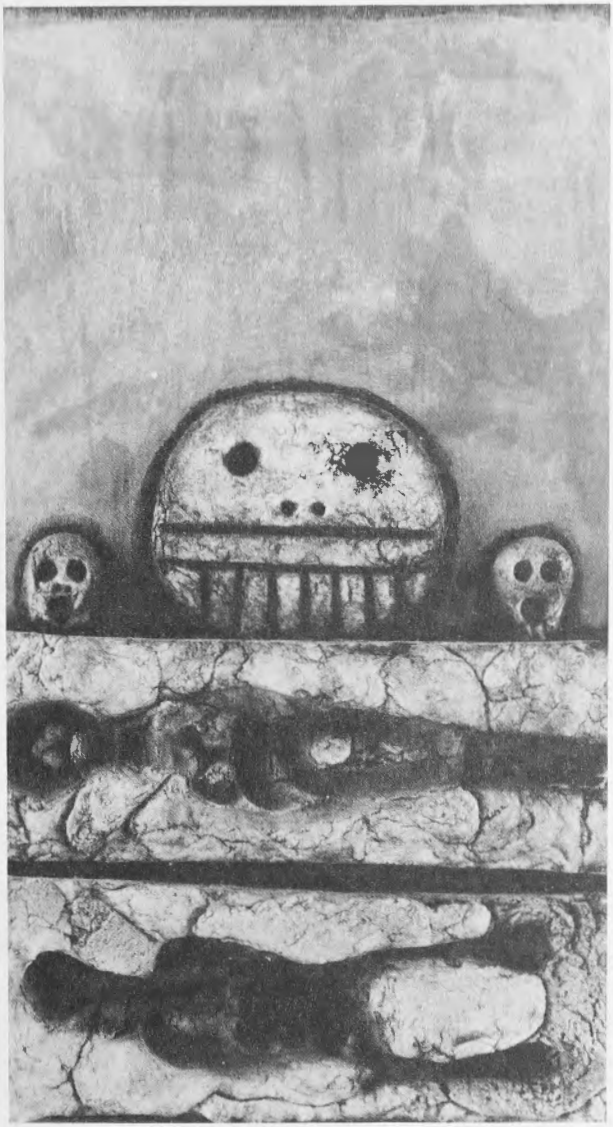
DOMINICK DI MEO

SIX WORKS



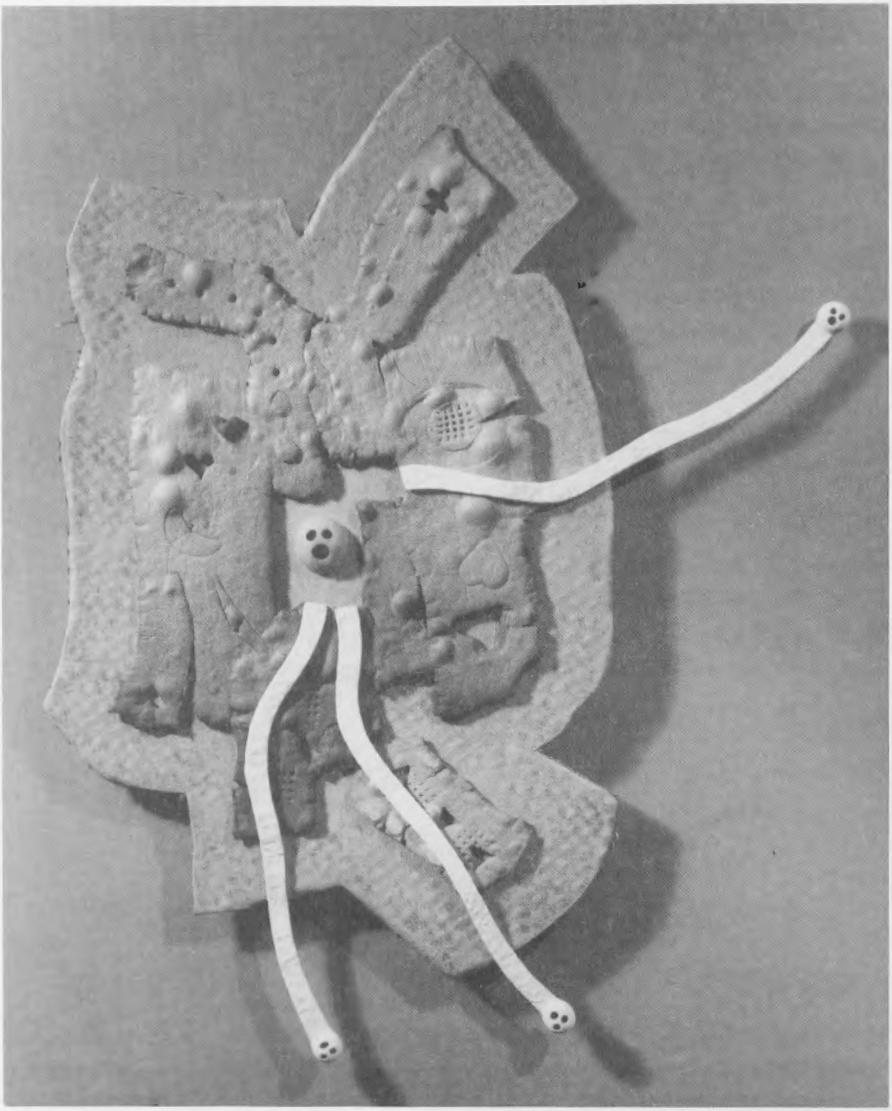
UNTITLED

1971, Synthetic polymer and polyform on canvas, 40" x 32"



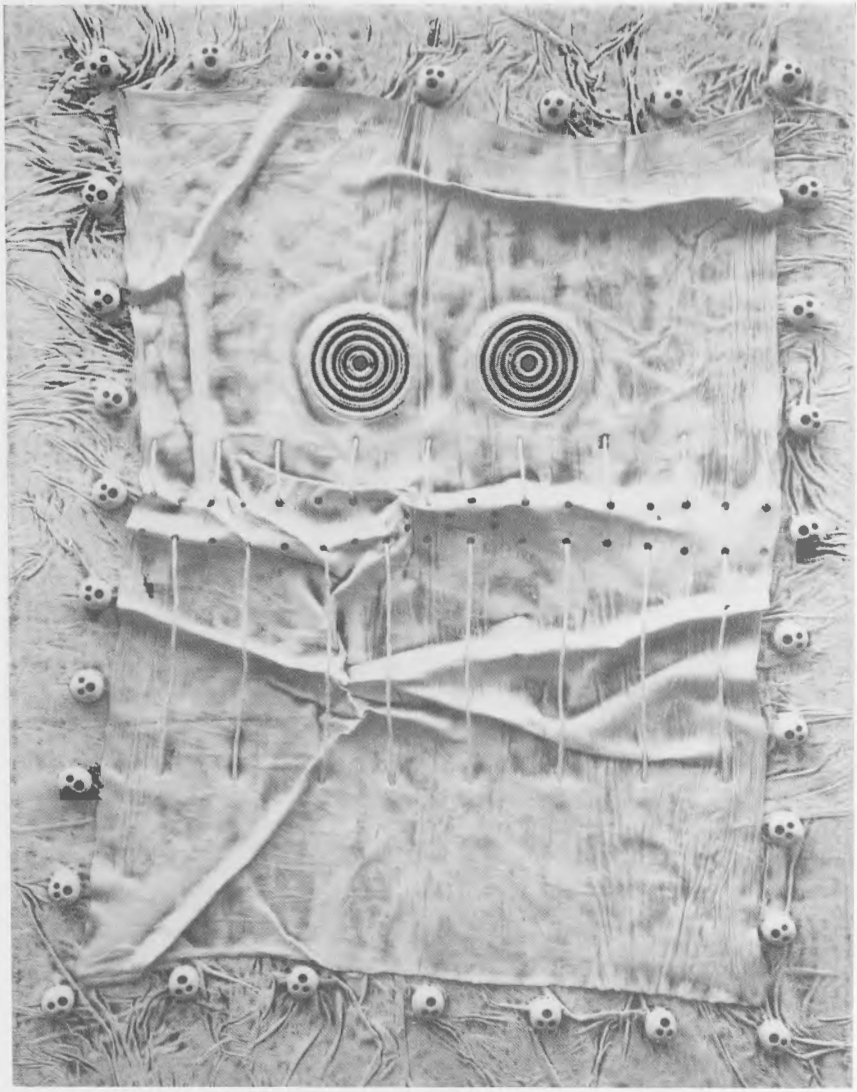
VARIATION ON A THEME BY T.H.

1960, Plastic on wood, 14" x 8"
Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Saul Bernstein,
Highland Park, Illinois



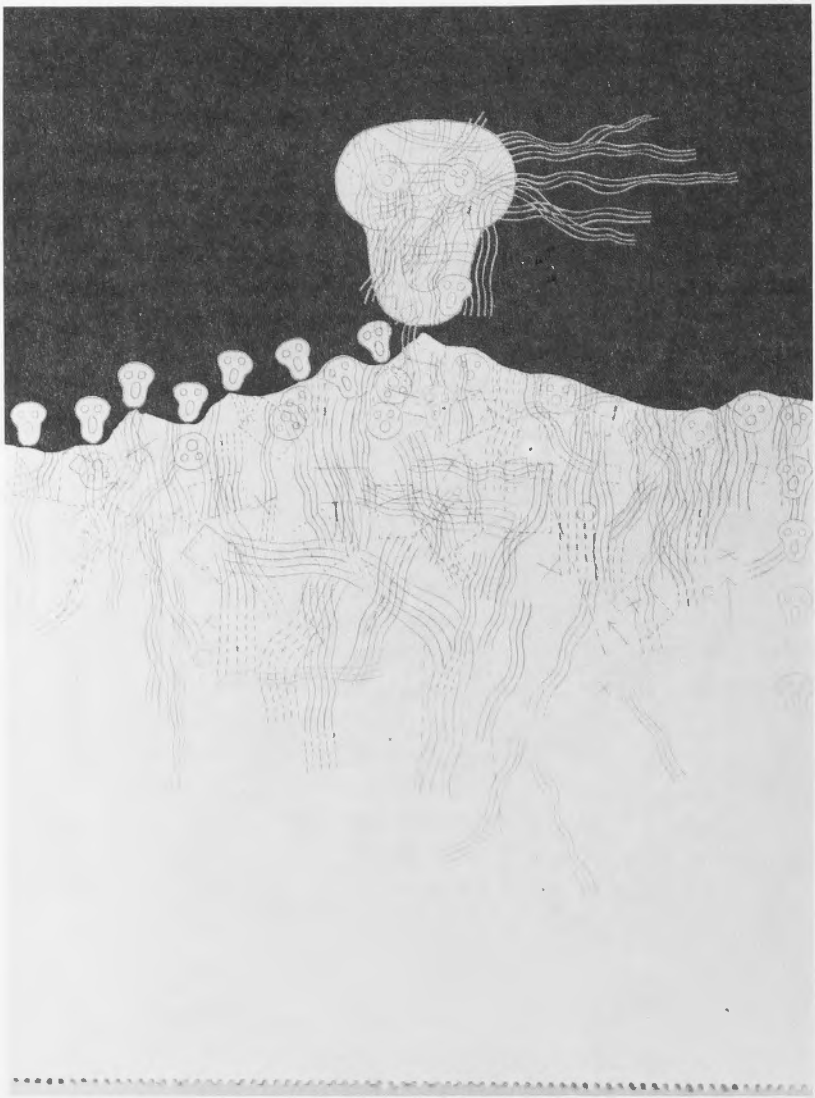
LITTLE DEVIL HEAD

1977, Synthetic polymer and polyform
20 1/2" x 13"
Collection: Judith Cousins,
New York City



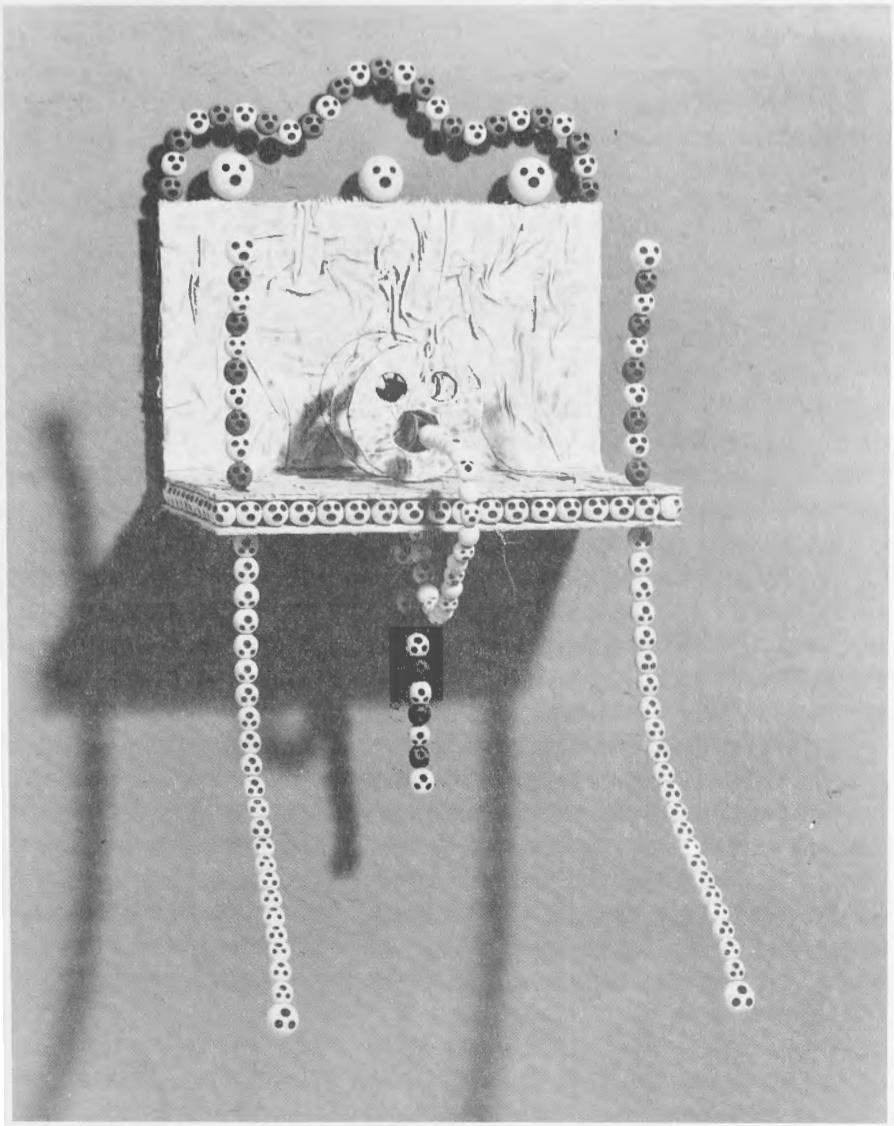
ENIGMA

1976, Synthetic polymer and polyform
on canvas, 32" x 24"
Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Rick Meyer,
Chicago, Illinois



LOVE CALL

1979, Carbon transfer and India ink on paper, 24" x 18"
(photograph by David Allison)



WALL PIECE

1985, Synthetic polymer and polyform
21" x 10 1/2" x 11"
(photograph by David Allison)

THREE POEMS

THE FACE OF LOVE

Hard to be face to face
to be and to stay
to stay face to face
with the face of love.

Eve closed her eyes
(Blake's notebook)
when the forcing serpent
when the serpent came.

Hard to be face to face
to be and to stay
stay between the tracks
when the snake train comes.

Snake with its poison
its poison its tongue
its bright eyes
bright and brighter eyes.

FOR INSTANCE

1
Grasshoppers in the corn
thudding sound
of their collision
against the dry and brittle stalks.

2
Green and bronze cicada
on the siding
pebbly siding of the house.

Cicada doesn't budge
as the bee sucks at a hole
in its head.

FREE GIFTS

Before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a string of blossoms
each member of the audience asked to bend down
string of plastic apple blossoms placed around each neck
before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a "night with the stars"
each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain
roar of an animal with golden mane flash of its mane
roar of an animal with its mane kiss of an animal
sudden kiss of an animal with its rough tongue
sudden kiss for each member of the audience
sudden kiss sudden wound for each member of the audience
before the kiss there are gifts there are free gifts
members of the studio audience receive free gifts
each member receives a string of blossoms
each member photographed with blossoms around each neck
polaroid photograph pinned to "night with the stars" curtain.

C. D. WRIGHT

TWO POEMS

WHAT NO ONE COULD HAVE TOLD THEM

Once he comes to live on the outside of her, he will not
sleep through the night or the next 400. He sleeps not, they
sleep
not. Ergo they steer gradually mad. The dog's head
shifts to another paw under the desk. Over a period of 400
nights.

You will see, she warns him. Life is full of television
sets, invoices, organs of other animals thawing on counters.

In her first dream of him, she leaves him sleeping
on Mamo's salt bag quilt behind her alma mater. Leaves him
to the Golden Goblins. Sleep, pretty one, sleep.

. . .the quilt that comforted her brother's
youthful bed, the quilt he took to band camp.

Huh oh, he says, Huh oh. His word for many months.
Merrily pouring a bottle of Pledge over the dog's dull coat.
And with a round little belly that shakes like jelly.

Waiting out a shower in the Border Cafe, the bartender
spoons a frozen strawberry into his palm leaf basket
while they lift their frosted mugs in a grateful click.

He sits up tall in his grandfather's lap, waving
and waving to the Blue Bonnet truck. Bye, blue, bye.

In the next dream he stands on his toes, executes
a flawless flip onto the braided rug. Re-springs to crib.

The salt bag quilt goes everywhere, the one the bitch
Rosemary bore her litters on. The one they wrap
around the mower, and bundle with black oak leaves.

How the bowl of Quick Quaker Oats fits his head.

He will have her milk at 1:42, 3:26, 4 a.m. Again at 6. Bent
over the rail to settle his battling limbs down for an afternoon
nap. Eyes shut, trying to picture what in the world she has on.

His night light—a snow white pair of porcelain owls.

They remember him toothless, with one tooth, two tooths,
five
or seven scattered around in his head. They can see the day
when he throws open his jaw to display several vicious rows.

Naked in a splash of sun, he pees into a paper plate the guest
set down in the grass as she reached for potato chips.

Suppertime, the dog takes leave of the desk's cool cavity
to patrol his high chair.

How patiently he pulls Kleenex from a box. Tissue
by tissue. How quietly he stands at the door trailing the White
Cloud;
swabs his young hair with the toilet brush.

The dog inherits the salt bag quilt. The one her Mamo made
when she was seventeen—girlfriends stationed around a frame
in black stockings sewing, talking about things their children
would do;

He says: cereal, bye-bye, shoe, raisin, nobody. He hums.

She stands before the medicine chest, drawn. Swiftly he
tumps
discarded Tampax and hair from an old comb into her tub.

Wearily the man enters the house through the back. She isn't
dressed.
At the table there is weeping. Curses. Forking dried breasts of
chicken.

while Little Sneed sat on the floor beneath the frame,
pushing the needles back through.

One yawn followed by another yawn. Then little fists
screwing little eyes. The wooden crib stuffed with bears and
wind-up pillows
wheeled in to receive him. Out in a twinkle. The powdered
bottom
airing the dark. The 400th night. When they give up their last
honeyed morsel of love; the dog nestles in the batting
of the salt bag quilt commencing its long, long mope to the
death.

detail from
WHAT NO ONE COULD HAVE TOLD THEM

Naked in a splash of sun, He pees into a paper plate
the guest set down on the lawn as she reached
naked in a splash of sun into a naked sun splash
He pees naked into a paper plate a plate the guest set down

into a plate of white paper the guest set down He pees
into a plate the guest set down on the lawn in the back of the
airy house
a paper plate the guest set down He pees on the lawn
He pees into a white paper plate a living fountain of pee
a golden jet of pure baby pee from His seven month old penis
His uncircumcised penis not even one year old a jet
of pure gold into an uncircumcised splash of sun
a beautiful gold arc of pee in a splash of uncircumcised sun
naked in a splash of sun He pees into a paper plate
a white paper plate the guest set down on the airy lawn
in back of the airy white house into a paper white plate
weighted down with baked beans and slabs of spiced ham
the guest set down on the lawn in back of the white house
on the lovely expanse of lawn the guest set down the paper
plate
on the lawn as she leaned forward in the canvas sling
of her chair as she reached out of her green sleeve
into a white paper plate the guest set down on the lawn He
pees
as she reached out of her green butterfly sleeve
out of the beautiful arc of her iridescent sleeve as she
set down on the expanding lovely lawn a paper plate
He pees naked in a splash of sun as she reached for potato
chips.

after Taggart

CID CORMAN

KUSANO SHIMPEI

The man was my friend. 20 years my senior. He wrote voluminously. Perhaps more than any other Japanese poet has ever done: I have over fifteen thick volumes of his COLLECTED WORK that appeared during the past 15–20 years, which he had sent me.

His poetry, to some extent, is known to every living Japanese person, since it is standard reading in junior high. His frog poems in particular. (The selection in the 1984 paperback—*asking myself/answering myself*—by New Directions is readily available for those who want a sense of earlier work.) His work is hard *not* to enjoy.

It has a deceptive simplicity and relates to his brother's work as well as Miyazawa Kenji, whose work he helped bring to attention. He was himself early on a translator of Carl Sandburg and had met the man. His affiliations have always been with the working class, a rough-and-tumble life. Nothing theoretical about it. Grit.

But it has never been a militant poetry. It is a poetry supremely of life—given to and taken from. Zest and ache. A sense of scale and of immediacy that goes beyond that of Bill Williams.

China—where he lived longer than any other modern Japanese poet—was vital to him and I'm sure the down-to-earth ethos of that nation and its people impressed him profoundly.

If he looms large in these late poems, he looms no larger than his frogs.

He is utterly unpretentious. Language is life for him. And life is poetry. And so he wrote—aware of this—with the utmost care and toughness.

His poetry is as fundamental to us as bread or rice—pickles and tea. He savored the unusual and the commonplace. When the bill-collector came to his house he invariably invited him in for a cup of tea and talk: his métier (like Pavese's) was life—the living of it—the being alive.

KUSANO SHIMPEI

A BATCH OF LATE POEMS

WINTER LIGHTNING

shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.
shishishishishishishi snow falling fast and thick.

suddenly.
lightningblue.

BARI BAREEN

shishishishishishishi " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "
shishishishishishishi " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "
shishishishishishishi " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "
shishishishishishishi " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "

NIGHT

.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.
.002mm.

beard growing.
black and white.

.001mm.
.001mm.
.002mm.
.001mm.

hair growing too.

.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.
.001mm.

life lessening.

BATHING

washing my body.
and stopping.
trying to figure out.
this far along into January.
it must be a hundred days without a bath.
January.
February.
March.
April.
not in the greatest shape but.
not been sick in a hundred days.
filth floating in the wash bowl.
weight 45 kilos of.
ugly belly.

the operation's vertical scars.
wrinkle wrinkle of lateral scars.
into thin extremities.
observing this specimen of an old person's ugliness.
I myself thought.
this is the very it they call an old ugly thing.
this must be it.
a hundred days without a bath.
prehistoric stuff?
hmm.

CERTAIN DAYS

1.

wearing a summer hat.
walked out into powdery snow.

looked over a temporary storage of radish
put up for the Abukuma Folk Art Museum.
inspected and delected those transferred
to the library yard after being wheeled out.

scooping up carp and rainbow trout in a landing net.
loosed them into the pool of the thirteenth night.

snowing in sunlight.

2.

woke at 4:30 a.m.
searched the cupboard.

drank homebrew *sake*.
sucked a ripe persimmon.

3.

walking along the frosty ranks reviewing
the garden trees in winter decay.
basking in the newborn sunlight a 67-year-old man
on his way for bread, *natto* and work gloves.

walking.
half the sky pale ultramarine.
the other gutter-rat gray clouds.
upper half of mountains brimming sunshine.
in summer machine-stitched pants.
the 67-year-old wearing sleeveless *kimono*
over a black sweater.

in the bag some extra.
mochi, sliced seaweed, carrots, etc.

back home.
rainbow icicles hanging from the waterpipe.
the 67-year-old chewing and swallowing them.

4.

ground a T'ang ink-stick.
wrote words.
drew bamboo.
and read a book.
ate fish and greens.
perfect.

5.

a young bicycle-racer friend.
    (attempted suicide-violence-bloodshed.)
out of his head report of it came.

6.

light powdery snow.
dancing in wind.
sank in the pool.

(life and death together deep within me.)
(flickering.)

Tenzan Library.
mats perched on.

((note: the Tenzan Library in the Nagano uplands was/is a repository of K's work and a summer study center for students of it))

BITING

—childhood nostalgia—

the Abukuma hills were gentle-sloping.

and I.
often nibbled.
pencil and.
lead.

Abukuma's heaven blue.
clouds flowed slowly on.

but I.
often chewed on.
the edge of my wrinkled Japanese reader and.
when I chewed into the text.
had to remember the lost parts.

the primary school stood alone in the rice fields.
in the shimmering spring haze.

but I bit a girl on the arm and.
was severely scolded by the teacher.

quiet *susuki*-grass hill and.
the days' *uguisu*.

but I.
in a rage had a fit.
with a bucket of water dashed over me.
finally came to.

I never cut my fingernails.
instead of scissors.
used my teeth.

at one spot in the gentle-sloping Abukuma hills.
huge granite towered.
holding onto an iron chain I climbed but.

the ruggedness of that Mt. Futatsuya.
was what I was as a child.

Abukuma's heaven blue.
clouds flowed calmly on nevertheless.

FOSSIL SNAIL

a dead snail.
turning beautiful continues on.

its outside's.
on a black ground white.
spiral pattern.

(really?)

Tyrolean Alps!
jetties against which.
brackish blue water.
dapplingly breaks.
foaming away.

TOAD

sun on the verge of setting.

at the foot of a magnolia tree in
the library garden by the mountain
azaleas a toad came hopping along.

seeing me the toad gave up hopping.

feeling mischievous I pissed on the toad.

(having had more than my quota of booze
it may have been on the hot side.)

one minute. two minutes. three minutes.
four minutes. five minutes. almost.

its eyes remained unblinking.

the toad moved not.

not even one millimeter.

I lost.

KAWAUCHI VILLAGE
FUTABA DISTRICT
FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE

where the river flows through rice fields.
char and dace are swimming.
when they are scooped up in a net so too.
are sometimes caught striped mudfish and char together.
this is unusual.

in a valley village deep in these mountains.
there are as many as twenty baseball teams.
every summer for two days on end in round robin play.
for a Japanese mountain village this is unusual too.

at 7:30 a.m. I was asked to throw out the first ball.
a one-eyed 76-year-old throwing the first ball.
this is unusual too.

a coming-of-age ceremony also occurs in the *o-bon* season.
those who have come of age come home for it.

an elder every morning delivers the papers.
a man from the slopes brings ***matsutake*** and ***shimeji***
mushrooms.

a fish dealer provides *bonito* innards free.
with his grandson and a radish in his bicycle basket a monk rides over.
the Tenzan lady with a bamboo ladle pours into a teapot hot water from a big iron kettle.
youngsters at the village office repair typhoon havoc.
Taka-chan tends to the new rice and vegetables.
Toshiko the *miso* and pickles.
the village chief, the chief's assistant and others.

I sit on a stone at the feeding place.
stirring the water bringing the carp right up to nibble my fingers.

on the 29th comes the celebration of the completion of the framework for the Abukuma Folk Museum.
I'll toss out red and white pieces of *mochi.*
those who catch or pick them up are children from the kindergarten.

then once more head back to wild and busy chaotic Tokyo.
but can any time return to this thatched house.
I'm an honorary villager here.
with an honorarium of 100 straw bags of charcoal each year.
this is comical and unusual too.

NOTE: When I was living in a rented room in Kashiwagi (Shinjuku) a truck came with 100 straw bags of charcoal. And were piled up in the small garden there. For the little weeds and flowers in the garden they may have posed a problem of the right to have access to the sunlight. (Later I was at a loss about what to do with them so I had them taken by a doctor friend. I decided to waive those annual deliveries of 100 straw bags of charcoal.) I had the empty truck bring back to the village cardboard boxes full of books. This led to the building of the Tenzan Library and next year is its 15th anniversary. As well the 15th Tenzan Festival. (If I were to have become an honorary citizen, I would have refused. The title "honorary villager" was

gladly accepted. I sometimes think I may be the first honorary villager ever. Its being unusual is good.)

24 Oct. 1979

*The Kashiwagi area was a slum and it hasn't changed much since Kusano was a young man.

A 77-YEAR-OLD'S NEW YEAR'S DAY

pretty soon the 77-year-old New Year's Day comes.
1980's New Year's Day.

I was born in iris-colored.
May it was.
it was my mother suffered.

instead of my mother at my birth.
my death I'll do my suffering for.

at least when the time comes for goodbye.
(it won't go as you think.)
so says physiology.

if so after all.
that will be my very own ethics indeed.

(Versions by Cid Corman,
assisted by Kamaike Susumu)

READING AFTER DARK

Nothing ages as rapidly as the new
Branching fields of weather & the economy—
The pure series of interruptions
Coined by accidental light—sooty illuminations
In a cloud; smoky bullion; the mellow glow
Photographed off old stones in courtyards; honeyed hive
Of morning sun; a dreamy pee in the snow
As drowsiness overtakes you—hiss
Of ice steaming, gold hole you sink into.
Finally, it is a matter of "light house keeping,"
Knowing how to or not to do, emerging as the right
To remain invisible—hidden entrance
To the royal theme: the Golden Book
Where you first saw the black spell of letters
Broken—Dora's adorable bees or, mere ardor's
Mirroir d'or—angel at the slicing machine.
Perhaps we are too easily pleased by this journey
Nobody goes on—its dangerous windows, dumb
Impediments, fallen walls, &—the geometer's
Nightmare—monstrous torsos
Carved from silence & from time, all the politics
Of mapmaking as the low hills rise in waves
To meet us & mountains knock us smack in the eye.
Yes, travelers should only read after dark,
But when the floods come, Signore, all the shit
Rises to the surface, giving off the stench
Of a language (scented with whorish green
Spanish soap) that smells as we do.
Under the smoking lamp, you labored—old rough
Skin redskin pig sprouting wings—producing sentences
Sublime in their foreshadowing, past
As premonition, just catching up to us—the late dark lyrics
Dusting with first light a bowl of blue Sicilian lilies.

VIRGINIA HOOPER

TWO POEMS

THE BOOK OF DREAMS

Freedom from physical discomfort
Or mental agitation. Freedom from great effort
Or difficulty; facility; to run with ease.
The weather had offered a strong resistance.
Ease is largely considered negative, denoting absence
Of effort, strain, hesitation, uncertainty.
Readiness is the ability to deal with whatever
Comes, and so implies alertness, promptness
And quickness. In all honesty, I had opted for ease
And so was not sufficiently prepared for adequate defense.
I had succumbed to a disabling case of ennui, apathy
And disgrace. Moments of tranquility
In the midst of the crowd sometimes work
If only to crowd out the issue. Let's consider beauty:
The quality of objects, sounds, ideas, attitudes, etc.
Which pleases and gratifies, as by their harmony,
Pattern, excellence, or truth. Let's forget
Cosmetics and proceed to the underlying theme.
Descriptive elements sketch out visionary
Landscape and admission into it; one senses
(From prefatory note of author) desire
For further development: introductory elements
Have been established, suggested, but stumble
At limit of referring without deeper penetration.
Welcome to the Pleasure Dome. Artifact revered
As incomplete (Greek and Roman ruins
Were being collected for their own intrinsic
Fragmentary beauty). We're a long way from home.

Fragmentary quality underscores elusive features
Of experience. We're not finished yet.
Nervous activity; bustle; commotion; frenzy.
Sectional views juxtapose as two kinds of loneliness:
Circumstantial and chosen—epiphany of accident
Taking one to threshold of death—dilation
Of time opening visage into awareness: mind
Recollects past connections to experience, identities,
Then all recedes to nothing. Hit the brakes.
Irony of experience is the sudden stillness
Which one expects to be death, release, draws
One back into the living. Relax. Stop tossing and turning.
An incredible slow, circuitous build-up
Of narrative experience and incident unfold
Toward encounter—a litany of description
Following the road to this event: meditative
Awareness of detail in environment, a dreamy
Divagation begins the night, the pace of telling
Mirrors this slow passage through the country,
Forward movement unravelling like a small, narrow
Road we imagine ourselves travelling with ease.
The predicable folding inward of day into night,
Of human drama following its repeatable patterns,
Winding into irony of amazing encounter
In the darkness. Sudden silence. Exaltation
Lifts the collective body of attention
Toward the mysterious. So far, the story went,
Nobody had solved the problem of transgression
Well enough for the text to be written
In the books. It was all anecdotal material.
The Narrative continued to extol the virtues
Of perfect sleep. The problem was well stated:
Bring back the evidence. The light inside the night
Ignited the mirror held to the circle of fire
Informing the framework of the world imposed.
We've been forced to look elsewhere for the form.
Sorrow drapes the day in plain white sheets.
Slipcovers protect what's injured from the weather.
The state, quality, or fact of being uncertain.

Make different; alter; transmute. To exchange;
Interchange; to change places. To enter upon a new phase.
An orderly and gradual progression or arrangement
According to size, quality, rank, degree, etc.
A step, degree, or relative position
In such a progression. A passing by imperceptible
Degrees from one shade of color or surface to another.
The color of the room had changed, the surface
Of the air had altered. The problem was well stated:
Bring back the evidence. Once I brought back
A fistful of silver coins. I spent them
Too prodigally for proof to be recorded.
I accepted the failure and proceeded to fall
Back in line with the essential premise
That the currency usually stays behind. Penetrate
The resistance, the epigraph had insisted in good faith.
I descended the staircase and stepped on level ground.
My pockets were empty. Another night would come.

ARGUMENT FOR RESURRECTION

The sum of two and one: a cardinal number.
Any symbol of this number, as 3, iii, or III.
Anything consisting of or representing three units,
as a playing card, team, etc. Being one more
than two. A circus in which separate acts
are carried on simultaneously in three ring-like
enclosures. Any situation characterized
by simultaneous activities, especially of bewildering
variety. To give a rotary motion to:
cause to rotate, as about an axis. To change
the position of, as by rotating: to turn the ground.

We buried him yesterday. To move so that the upper side
becomes the under: to turn the page. To bring
the subsoil to the surface, as by plowing or spading.
To revolve mentally; ponder: often with over.
We made a pact that he would come back briefly.
A situation requiring a choice between
equally confusing alternatives; a perplexing
predicament. An argument that presents a protagonist
with two (or more) alternatives, but is equally
conclusive against her, whichever alternative
she chooses, the third point being the angle
of observation. Having a cavity within;
enclosing an empty space; not solid; a hollow
sphere. Having a deep opening or depression
formed by scooping out; concave. A valley; basin.
A round, wide shallow vessel, often with sloping sides.
A vessel resembling this, as the scale or pan
of a balance. The amount that a basin will hold.
She carefully weighed the alternatives.
Toward what is ahead or what is in front; onward.
Out into a conspicuous position. The actual remains
of plants or animals, preserved in the rocks
of the earth's crust. Some petrified trace
of the existence of an early organism, as a footprint.
One of certain inorganic objects or phenomena
of ancient geological ages, as solidified ripple marks.
To become slightly agitated on the surface,
as water running over a rough, pebbly memory,
or blown by a light breeze. To set or institute
a different cycle in: He is both absent and present.
An open way for public passage, especially from one
city, town, or village to another. Any way
of advancing or progressing: the road to release.
Road, highroad, turnpike, lane, and thoroughfare
are compared as they denote ways for interurban or rural
travel. Road in the general word. A highroad
is one adapted for fast travel, as by the elimination
of steep hills, sharp curves, frequent intersections,
and the like. Thoroughfare is a road accessible

at both ends: this word is now rare in specific names,
but survives in the phrase *No thoroughfare.*
To consider again, especially with a view
to a reversal of a previous action. A turnpike
is a road on which a toll is collected. A lane
is a private road giving access to a public thoroughfare,
or may be a narrow road. Not fastened
or confined; unbound: a loose end. Something left
undecided or undone, as a task, decision, etc.
We negotiated the passage. The lane was open.
The act of bursting into leaf, or the state
of being in leaf. The arrangement or formation
of leaves in a bud. In certain rocks, a crystalline
formation into leaflike layers: also the layers themselves.
The consecutive numbering of the leaves of a book.
A bound set of printed sheets of paper, usually between
covers. A volume of blank or ruled pages
for written entries: a ledger, register, etc.
Something regarded as a source of inspiration:
the book of experience. By memory.
To enter or list in a book. To arrange for
beforehand, as accommodations or seats.
Joining; connective. Serving to unite both meaning
and construction. The frontier line or district
of a country. A design or stripe in the margins
of a page or book. A bordering strip of ground,
commonly planted with flowers, as along the edge
of a walk. To lie along the border of; bound.
To strike and spring back from a surface, as a ball.
To leap; move by a series of leaps. To cause
to bound with joy. Made fast; tied with bonds.
Having cover or binding. Certain; sure: it's bound
to rain. Devotedly attached to. Having one's course
directed; on the way; destined: bound for home.

JED RASULA

LITERACY EFFECTS IN THE WAD: HANDLING THE FICTION, NURSING THE WOUNDS*

1. There is a ludicrous complaint I've heard poets make for as long as I can remember: "if only poetry didn't have to compete with tv . . ." What is it that makes this fantasy so durable?—for surely, with a little reflection, those who make this comparison would be hard put to contend that a permanent electrical outage would send droves of people to poetry as an alternative form of entertainment.

A more cogent point of comparison would rephrase Pound's dictum about poetry being as well written as prose: poetry should be at least as well written as a network television episode. (In all honesty, I can't see why anyone should abandon ABC's hit series "thirtysomething" to bone up on this year's *L.A. Times* Book Award selection in poetry, our Poet Laureate Richard Wilbur's *Collected.)*

What is misleading about aspirations by poets to compete with tv programming is the corollary that poetry is an entertainment medium. There was a time when poetry was read as bite-sized moral edification; but the moral was gone long before tv encapsulated the edification into the half-hour sitcom and the hour long dramatic series.

The real issue posed by the spectacle of the mass captive audience for tv programming is trivialized by confusing it with poetry. By way of immediate, harrowing contrast, consider this, written by René Char while fighting the Nazis in the Resistance: "Between reality and its report, there is your life which magnifies reality, and this Nazi abasement which ruins its report" (#126 in *Leaves of Hypnos).* Television, as Eliot Weinberger has reminded me, does not bear comparison with the Nazi abasement; it's competition is not with poetry, but with *bios* as such—lived human time—so-

* The following text was delivered at the Sulfur Conference at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, March 26, 1988

matic beings not destroyed, but rather prosthetized by their attachment to such devices. If we want to discover how the report (the concussive sound) of poetry is "ruined," we'll have to look elsewhere.

2. Poetry reviewing generally makes no attempt to contextualize poetry (in relation even to other art institutions, let alone the life of a community or a group). A poetry review is typically a book report on an isolate, self-indulgent moment of pleasurable introspection. As such, the only prospective reader of poetry is a consumer, who is then simply making a generic choice. This amounts to a massive corrosion of the language of value as it might be applied not only to poetry, but to "cultural literacy."

Poetry solicited for the ideology of privacy adheres to the following principles: (1) it must demonstrate a restraint of the stimulations or aggressions that inhere in charged or intense language; (2) it must display fidelity to the poet's personal life; (3) this fidelity, this "being true to life" must affirm a certain sufficiency inherent in all of us; (4) it must be an innocuous artifact and in no way seek to challenge its status as private concern of a handful of consumers.

The ideology of privacy stipulates that, like any consumer product, poetry be another tool for social disengagement, a leisurely interest, a hobby. *Consumption* was a euphemism for a 19th century "wasting disease": now it's the preferred lifestyle of the "stable subject," though the stable subject is best regarded as an ailing domestic animal.

It's no longer a matter of "meeting the world halfway"; there's no such thing as privacy—privacy has been deleted. Leisure time is now archaic. What is now called leisure or free time is, instead, a differently calibrated sort of duty, the zone of bricollage in which we cut and snip and sort and paste our attentions, so we become prosthetic supplements to the total-body effect of the media, the coherent and pervasive final report that drifts along just out the door.

It is, as Marx forecast, a later stage of the system that produces objects for the subject: now, more than ever, a subject must be produced for the object. (Think of how eagerly we adapt ourselves like mobile components to VCR, phone answering machine, compact disc, personal computer.)

So there is a predominance of first-person singular, home-movie poetry, poetry busy displaying adaptable subjectivity in its natural habitat.

3. Let's call this first-person singular poetry hegemony (even when it says "we" it really means "more of me") *"PSI"* for Poetry Systems Incorporated, subsidiary to data management systems.

It is a business. Its business is producing "the self." (Notice how this is not only a commodity, but a specialty item. We know this because it had to be exported from abroad.) In the subjectivity market, you can't just get it anywhere. Only certain venues offer it, and PSI product is one of the venues (though all the predominant pedagogic and information sources will generalize PSI product to, simply, "poetry").

How can you identify PSI product? It's as easy as subscribing to any of the 200 popular magazines hawked by College Subscription Service, as easy as joining the Book of the Month Club, or getting cable tv. PSI product is available in any chain bookstore. Your local mid-size community library will stock nothing but PSI poetry (often that's all your university library will have as well). *The New York Times Book Review* is its corporate newsletter. Or you can read the critics, whose examination of the scope of contemporary poetry is so routinely unadventurous that it amounts to in-house PSI publicity copy: slick appraisals to be printed in glossy brochures (if poetry as a cultural product ever became that marketable), or living out the half-life of the excerpted blurb.

4. But poetry also arrives by other means. Alvin Rosenfeld, a scholar of holocaust literature: "A manuscript written secretly and at the daily risk of life in the Warsaw ghetto; buried in milk tins or transmitted through the ghetto walls at the last moment; finally transmitted to us—such a manuscript begins to carry with it the aura of a holy text. Surely we do not take it in our hands and read it as we do those books that reach us through the normal channels of composition and publication. But how *do* we read it?"

This is the question I want to stay in the vicinity of.

But first, what exactly are the "normal channels" Rosenfeld refers to? Obviously he means the simple expedience of publication. But publication is never so simple or expedient as we might

believe, thinking of "normal channels." Publication is simply one part of a much larger social process, which is the *segregation of access to significant symbols.*

A normal channel in this culture is a television channel—and I don't mean this as a pun. Newspaper; magazines; films; recordings; radio; PSI product—all normal channels. What is a reader (a viewer, a listener) for the publishing media that constitutes normal channels? A reader is a digit, a statistical guarantor of the precise scale of another kind of beast known as "the audience." To compete with tv is to yearn for an unknown and ultimately *captive* audience.

5. "Normal channels," then, are the dominant channels. Dominant channels mean channels that dominate the attention of the unknown audience.* Stanley Aronowitz: ". . .mass art [is] one-way communication [which] takes on the character of domination."

Dominant channels are operated by media entrepreneurs who deploy a product in a medium in order to get the attention of an audience. This is the hook inside the bait of entertainment. This marketing angle regards the unknown audience as accessible only in captivity. The audience is transported invisibly and electronically as statistical integers in the contractual bargaining agreement between network and advertiser.

You've heard of the Nielsen families; these non-electable officials are, in effect, your congressional delegates in a national literacy forum, determining what goods and services we all have access to by means of "normal channels." Recently the networks have threatened legal retaliation against the Nielsen agency because its new method of eliciting viewing-information from the statistical sample showed a massive overall decline in the size of the audience for network television.

The new Nielsen system required each individual in the family to enter a personal code when watching a program, so that they could be demographically identified. The network claim that a

* The "unknown public" was envisioned by novelist Wilkie Collins *(The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White)* as "now waiting to be taught the difference between a good book and a bad. It is probably a question of time only." Writing in the high noon of Victorian optimism, Collins imagined that this unknown audience "must obey the universal law of progress and must, sooner or later, learn to discriminate." It's later than he ever would have thought possible.

significant number of people didn't do this, whether true or not, reflects a telling hesitation on the part of network top brass to know who they're addressing. It is the dictatorship by managerial style—though the style outlasts the individuals whose "taste" and "discrimination" constitute it. As long as an audience can be *targeted* demographically (product X for "baby boomers") then the statistical sampling methods are ok; but when the sampling procedure allows (or requires) too much intervention or interference on the part of individual audience members, then something must be wrong. (Horror of horrors—maybe the 10-year-old girl switching on the tv and not punching in her code name is refusing to produce herself as a subject for that object.) The implicit injunction to the captive audience (name, rank and serial number) is to concede volition to the broadcast medium, in exchange for the privilege of "participating" in the statistical process—just another episode in the lifelong mini-series of political abstinence: ". . .the renunciation of the question of political right through the private pursuit of well-being" (O'Neill).

This is the participation mystique of an industrial-communications society. It is also a residual sort of mind-cure theology. Donald Meyer, writing on the "positive thinking" cults of the 19th to early-20th century: "Mind-cure theology was purely expressive. That is, it was the immediate projection of uninspected wish"—an impeccable description, as well, of commercial advertising, in which a product is projected into the virtual psychological space where wishes congregate. Wishful thinking, in Meyer's analysis, is a contradiction in terms: "The wish for plenty was not the wish to have one's wishes fulfilled; it was the wish not to have to wish wishes of one's own at all." Wishful thinking is that studiously orchestrated set of tactics of disavowal known as 'keeping the faith.'

All that is required to be literate with regard to normal channels is faith. The distinction between poetry and tv can be usefully reviewed by way of David Jones: "It must be understood that art as such is heaven—it has outflanked the fall—it is analogous not to faith but to charity."

6. Am I actually saying that mind-cure theology is alive and well, that normal channels like PSI poetry product (prime, canners and utility grades, following Ed Dorn) are massive sedatives, alleviat-

ing us from the burden of having to wish our own wishes?

It's not quite so simply dominant. Mind-cure theology is not finally connected with literacy but with numeracy. As Ian Hacking suggests, numeracy precedes literacy. (Numeracy is the ability to relish and manipulate number-symbols discursively. Sports-broadcasting is numerate, not literate; David Letterman's top-ten lists and Harper's Index are numeracies shading over into literacy.)

Mind-cure theology is historically linked with another 19th century vogue known as "moral science" (information about and control of the moral tenor of a population). What used to be called moral science we now know as "statistics." Mind-cure theology and the moral science of statistics are both means of sampling the (then "unknown") audience, to take its moral pulse. It's written into the Constitution, which stipulates census-taking as a duty. With that, we're committed to numeracy, at the expense of literacy.

"Moral science" has long been fully democratized in the sense of being spread around through government agencies and the private sector alike. Through the courts, by means of taxes, public works, welfare, education, and the feedback-facilities of entrepreneurial "normal channels," a census is continually being taken.

7. The unknown audience is not so unknown now—captivity breeds familiarity. The normal channels have asked us to identify ourselves, and we have. Eagerly. *What's your name?* —Evelyn. *And what do you do, Evelyn?* —I'm a legal secretary. *And where are you from?* Tallahassee, Florida. —My name is Everett, and I'm a systems analyst from Kalamazoo. . .this rudimentary scenario is played out all day long on tv sets and radio broadcasts across the land.

We have become very adept at being informants, in the strict ethnographic sense of the term. We tell the moral scientist whatever he wants to know (it's still usually a he). We're actively recruited all the time for information about ourselves. Not truly different information—nothing that would single any of us out as being positively unique—but for the information that makes us typical.

In this light, PSI poets have simply been more gregarious and forthcoming than the rest of us, as moral science informants. (Although, as Charles Bernstein points out, they are a bit more cul-

pable in that they are directly involved in designing the parameters of the questionnaire.)

8. Being an informant is intrinsically a bid for entitlement. Making oneself heard, speaking up for others, displaying one's qualifications. Qualifications for what? For the benefits forthcoming from colonial administrative practices.

The inexorable bankrolling effect of cumulative statistics is something we all feel burdened by, as witnesses and as participants or informants. My social security number is of more significance to more people than all the poetry I will ever write: that is, it connects more readily than poetry to an available public medium (demographics and other tabulations of group dynamics); it contributes incessantly and functionally to an ongoing story—a story the nation is conscripted to produce, as if contractually. We're all *under contract* to History.

Consequently, many people feel positively chosen, elected, to bear witness in the mode of the informant. It is a means of entitlement. Consider as illustration the matter of Love Canal residents on the issue of chromosome damage due to dioxin contamination of groundwaters: in 1980 the New York State Health Commissioner stated categorically that these afflicted Love Canal residents were "not qualified" to hold an opinion regarding their own health. Since the authorities wouldn't listen, the residents took their stories to the press, which was willing to entitle them as informants.

This is what I call a "literacy effect." (I'm poaching on Roland Barthes' "reality effect.") The literacy-effect occurs when "normal channels" of transmission make a commitment to "moral science" as statistical equation, when Representative Sampling and Standard Deviation become operational norms, along with Diagnostic Testing and methods for calculating Probabilities, and when the "unknown" audience can be positively identified only insofar as it is a captive audience.

9. What is literacy? Literacy is the guidance, supervision and correction of *comprehenston*—per se: how we're comprehensive, how we come to understand that though we don't know everything, whatever we know composes an All. I like the word 'com-

prehension,' as it bifurcates into "understanding," on the one hand, and "encompassing" on the other. The literacy-effect propagated through normal channels guarantees that these two distinct capacities of comprehension will *not* be brought together.

Two illustrations, parables:

> —Literacy-effect #1: Once a code of the masterpiece prevails in the arts, the colorful and exotic in travel, and the spectacular in nature, then the most perfunctory *sign* of the thing suffices as a mark of authenticity. Artworks become the sample representations of the durable institutional category "Art" (just as prose comes to represent the institution of literacy as such, alphabetic competence).
> —Literacy-effect #2: The establishment of a 'proper' or innate domain of literature (with its classics as universal emblems of an omnipotent literacy, with its various subdivisions into genre, mode, style) is the exercise of what I would call a "self-inflicted literacy" as in "self-inflicted wound." To attend to something because a normal channel retails it as a masterpiece (a "must read" for snobs) is to be a victim of one's own intelligence—*self-inflicted literacy.**

10. Obviously, these literacy-effects might just as well be called "canon-effects."

The canon, like any bureaucratically administered operation, takes its directives from licensed operators. The formal and legal requirements for operating canonical mechanisms are analogous to those for obtaining an aviator's license.

Next time you read Ashbery: listen for the sonic traces of disconnection and detachment as a living body is made to endure the stress of "rehabilitation" within the canon.

The canon is something that needs living human subjects as recreational ammunition under the bigtop. Under the watchful eyes of licensed operators.

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*Self-inflicted wounds were often suspected in World War I, but even more scandalous at the time were those soldiers suffering from combat hysteria and other disorders previously thought to be "female." Such cases received little sympathy, and were branded "moral invalids" (see Leeds).

Think of the canon as the Elks Club, or better yet the Pentagon, a supervisory body enacting its custodianship of the canon of war ("peace" not being an operable term in Pentagon jargon, which prefers to speak of "permanent pre-hostility").

Or think of it as a Natural History Museum with its dioramas. Ever notice how in such exhibits the stuffed animals don't have bullet holes? The essence of the canon (the natural history diorama, the anthology of masterpieces with its "perfect specimens") is to eliminate the bullet-holes, to delete any trace of how the critter was bagged.

11. In the institutional double-bind of the canon—with its normal or normative channels, its administrative homeorhesis or supervised pathways of change—with its informants and its licensed operators, the arts are taken as work done now but for the benefit of "posterity." The arts are the happy side, the upscale heritage we pass along to our progeny to counterbalance their interest payments on our present national debt.

Am I implying that the arts are a subsidiary necrology?

Muzak for eternity?

It's hard to persist in doubt and uncertainty; hard to conceive an order outside canons and masterpieces, but not because of the old model of an entrenched bastion of privilege, a stronghold of conservatism resisting change. The canon is a mechanism for managing change, for stage-managing the theatrical milieu of "permanence." At stake in the issue of things canonical, as John Guillory suggests, is "the constitution and distribution of cultural capital."

And he adds: "Necessarily this is a question of the social differentiation of speeches, or the relation between the means of literary production and the institutions of social reproduction within which speakers succeed or fail to speak for themselves."

Do we speak for the same, or speak for change? The issue itself is not stable. It oscillates. The literacy-effect is simply the directive to classify canonically.

12. Homeorhesis: the biologist C. H. Waddington coined the term to mean "ensuring the continuation of a given type of change."

A multinational corporate head: "For several years we thought we had to manage a crisis and find a new equilibrium; we now

know that this idea is incorrect, and that change has to be permanent." If this corporate chief had read *The Communist Manifesto* he would have had this clearly spelled out for him, as "constant revolution in the modes of production."

Change *has to be* permanent. This makes capitalism sound like the purest of Heraclitean perceptions. No wonder so many are attracted to the "poetry of the marketplace."

But some scholars of comparative literature have lately drawn the same conclusions: Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay—"Prose is much more heraclitean [than poetry], it begins with change and seeks only to find ways of managing it."

In the late middle-ages and the rise of the vernacular throughout Europe, prose emerged as the faceless, characterless inner constitution of writing, as such, something so intrinsically unformed it could adapt itself to the changes. Unlike verse, prose was not a genre and brought with it no generic impediment.

As Godzich and Kittay explain, the oral tradition of the jongleurs (a verse-dominant "normal channel") handled change by investing the singer with custodianship of his materials. He could play on the cultural changes as they occurred, by working within the mastery of oral components which, being oral, were flexible.

But the dissolution of the universal power of the Holy Roman Empire, and the gradual separatism of emerging nation-states, required means of legitimation not contingent on nomadic sophists—which the jongleurs were becoming (singers for hire). These changes required documents which could embody difference without seeming to impose their own ritual legacies on the new material. "The move to documentary truth acknowledges the impossibility of containing time and its changes but manages to locate a form of preserving identity within it, namely an unchanging piece of paper" (xviii).

Now, before it appears I'm too far off the track: just to remind you, the issue is one of change, which is the dominant fact of Western civilization for a thousand years. ("What does not change / is the will to change.") And the language of change is prose. The concern of prose is "finding ways of managing change": it is intrinsically bureaucratic, administrative. Anything which holds its ground, which appears to resist change, is subject to the reconstructive surgery of disciplinary measures (punitive as well as scholastic). "In order to know. . .one has to occupy fleetingly a

fragile position for the purposes of knowing. Such positions and purposes are precisely what disciplines specify. By contrast, he who simply 'inhabits' is now but a native informant. His perspectives are not positionally constructed for purposes of knowledge, and thus they demand interpretation, demand to be themselves juxtaposed, overlaid, *put* in perspective."

These are the procedures I have described elsewhere as "The American Poetry Wax Museum." Poetry, not "positionally" (read: institutionally) constructed for the purposes of knowledge is subject to forcible acts of administrative jurisdiction (or critical interpretation). Entertainment is administratively prose—that is, it is "administered" like medication. Administered by licensed operators, colonial officials, custodians of what Burroughs calls "the wad," or what in Rastafarian argot is "the shitstem."

13. Now, this has all been a detour to emphasize that "normal channels" are prose channels. Prose is the expedient medium of our access to any information.

Like Molière's Mr. Jourdain, we talk in prose without knowing it. We're inside prose, it's all around us. We engage specific genres in order to get a grip on this otherwise monotonous uniformly surrounding medium. And of course it's no surprise that the predominant media are prose—fiction, scripts, essays, journalism, history, all prose.

Poetry necessarily operates from inside prose—a fact well enough known by the mid-19th century and the advent of the "prose poem." There's no getting out of prose.

Bruno Latour has described how Pasteur successfully marketed his vaccination against the anthrax bacillus by making the "natural" environment of the barnyard into a sort of field-version of his laboratory. If the conditions of the laboratory are adapted by farmers, the unpredictable threat of anthrax can be monitored and controlled. This is how it is with prose; prose is, as it were, the hygienic laboratory which makes the whole world over in its own image. Prose can provide immunity from unwanted microparasites because it is, itself, the dominant macroparasite. Prose is the universal lab that simulates the literacy effect.

So the issue is no longer one of genre, personal preference, talent, genius, any of that—all of which are performative, all

which haplessly fall prey to the administrative judiciousness of prose.

The issue, in other words, is not one of *writing*. The issue is reading.

14. *Do you read me—over and out.* "Read" in this sentence is an injunction to decode, cybernetically, a bivalve message: always binary, it will say yes/no past/present in/out male/female nature/culture negative/positive normal/deviant manifest/latent figure/ground passive/active form/content. Simple alphabetic literacy very quickly turns into methods for choosing between binary configurations like these.

I prefer to seek alliance with any practice of writing that refuses to treat binary elements or dual possibilities as injunctions to choose. So I hear Virginia Woolf's savoring of the "man womanly" and the "woman manly" in *Room of One's Own* as a kindred perception. To abide with both elements of a seemingly incompatible equation is to enact a poetics. This is what I have called (and spelled) *w*reading, or *how poetics exceeds its poetry*. This is the writing we read towards.

This is an increasingly threatened, unstable, dimly acknowledged respirator, this poem or other scrap of writing that appears like the writing Woolf imagines written in chalk on the pavement and instantly rubbed out by the heedless crowds walking across it. How do we read this writing? Writing that comes to us already vanishing, already obsolete, lacking any serviceability as textbook classic, masterpiece, map, skyline, history, brochure, guided audio tour. How to read beyond the gastronomic literacy of any writing that can be pre-digested, suitable for Reader's Digest? How to read beyond Gastronomic Literacy Effects with their additives and preservatives, their trouble-free convenience packages—PSI Poetry and the enriched-flour vocabulary of analytic appraisal that effortlessly accompanies it, speaking of "the poet" and "the poem" (or now, increasingly, "the text"), and always, trailing helplessly along behind, that native informant, "the self."

15. This has been the most auspicious place, this continent, to undertake such a wreading. From Emily Dickinson—if not from the earliest explorer's diaries—with her comprehension of just

how ample the tight spaces inside words, between words, could be.

> Publication—is the Auction
> Of the Mind of Man—
> Poverty—be justifying
> For so foul a thing
>
> Possibly—but We—would rather
> From Our Garrett go
> White—Unto the White Creator—
> Than invest—our Snow. . . [#709]

—think of Stevens' snowman, compounding the nothing that is not there with the nothing that is.

To place the person in the text as a reader is to endow it with mobility—to take it up off that "unchanging piece of paper" by making the fictive certainty of the paper itself palpable, viable, active. To read is to experience time as strangeness itself, in which you come to reckon with the spatial mystery of a voiceless speech and a bodiless embodiment. "To not finally know whether I am reading or writing" (Clark Coolidge).

As poets we largely devote our efforts to sculpting this space, this difference, into a habitat. A respiratory cavern which is wreading—with a "w." (Respiration is to wreading what inspiration is to writing.) Wallace Stevens is so compelling because his nearly exclusive concern is what it feels like to breathe, to stretch out, to fabulate in the sensorium of, such environs as "the drowsy motion of the river R."

It's not surprising that Stevens—avatar of the "supreme fiction"—should be the favored poet in an academic milieu which has bitten off more than it could chew with deconstruction and its relentless (juggling-without-net) demonstrations of the fictive layering of all "reality effects."

What's alarming is the neglect of parallel homegrown strategies proposing to take up an active role in handling the fiction—the tradition that passes from Pound's ideograms through composition by field, Olson's proprioceptive "resistance" a heartbeat away from negative capability, Kerouac's bop prosody, Rothen-

berg's symposium of the whole, Silliman's "new sentence" and much more. What do we make of the conspiratorial public ignorance of so ardent a legacy, this poetics that addresses the "artifice of absorption" that surrounds us, dispelling the reality effects and the literacy effects in order to grasp the fictive certainty that, as Duncan put it, "the real has just those boundaries we are willing to imagine." And further, that in the vacuous pressure-cooker of the postmodern (the Baudrillardean snowfield of hyperreal simulacra), "The task now is to imagine the real" (Robert Jay Lifton). That, in fact, the imagination has *real work* to do.

16. Normal channels, prose channels, are the media of compliance. They are the means by which unknown audience consents to captivity by testing positive to a numeracy syndrome, agreeing to a certain effacement in order to personally "typify" some statistical groundswell. In this sense, to "go native" now means that the entire culture has surrendered to its own colonization.

The milk tin passed through ghetto walls is easy to see, like Char's "Nazi abasement." Harder to see—and this is the necessary literacy, this recognition—is any act of real testimony in the midst of so many testimonials (PSI documents of compliancy with canonical administrative procedures.)

What is it that distinguishes testimony from the testimonial?—the difference is discernable in Peter Sloterdijk's complaint that "No one talks anymore of a *love* of wisdom. There is no longer any knowledge whose friend *(philos)* one would be. It does not occur to us to love the kind of knowledge we have. . ." Testimony is knowledge for which this has occurred, in which the eros of befriending what we know is intact, for as it's written in *Finnegan's Wake,* "we ought really to rest thankful that at this deleteful hour of dungflies dawning we have even a written on with dried ink scrap of paper at all to show for ourselves. . ."

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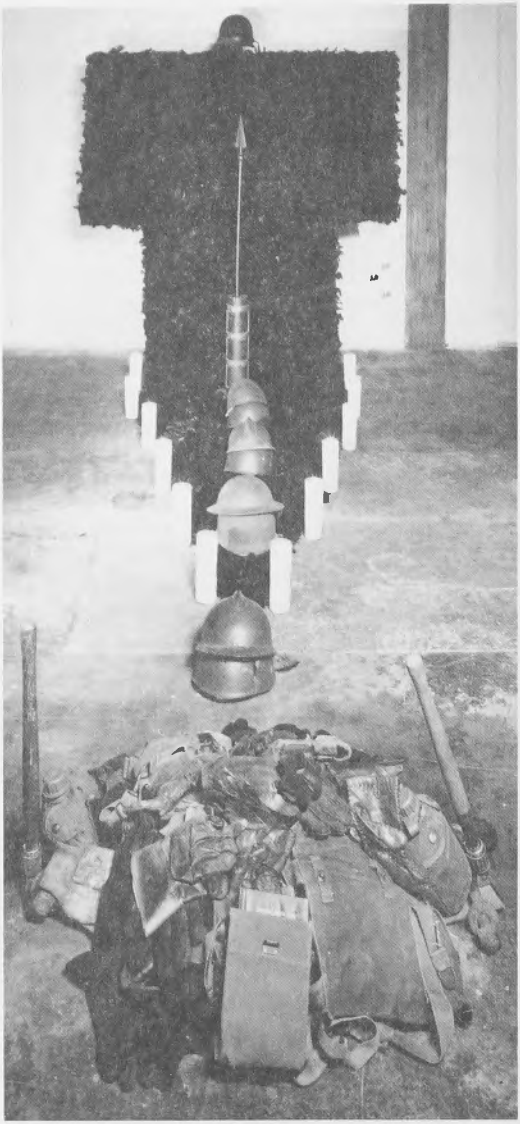
GERDA MEYER BERNSTEIN

SIX WORKS

ASHES TO ASHES

Mixed media construction
12' x 15'



VIETNAM MEMORIAL

Construction with turkey feathers
10' x 18'

PROCESSION

Walk-in installation (interior view)
22' x 10'

THE SCREAM

Painting and Kodolith
40" x 60"

HOMAGE TO RAOUL WALLENBERG

Construction (detail)
6' x 6'

ARMY OF THE DISAPPEARED

Walk-in installation
25' x 32'

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

SUNSICKNESS

Blame it on resembling, as if it would
change so easily, rough up glares
or trace avenues by fingertip.
You skirt on top afraid to sink
into and why not
falter, marched into elides, forked by
definition or conscripted from declamation—
the founding harbors faced it thus.
Then alone on hooks, trying
to get loss, the ground
refusing way. There's
no point, you proceed with intermittent
steps, & when the starting line appears
it can't be said
it's the same. No inanity suited
better then this poled tack. Nor
too much light either—heaving like
you'd just been hit in the face by a
wave—yet no particle
cares that much. I'd wager you've
had it by now—burn or defraud your
comeuppance as some sort of serial madness,
pegged to the flap that won't mind its
places. There was azure, agate, fool's
dust, but I never got any, just this
speculative bonfire. I'd give you credit
for that—but credit never satisfied

you. & after that there's only bone or blood
or sinew & not enough to share. Certain
things are private or anyway demand
privacy—but I'd be reluctant to say
who. No more than you I'm content
to lay low, tank up on decompression
& sing a chord or two—not possible
to remember many more than that. Or failing
to note the calm (calamity), fall prey to
remoter executions (I mean command
from distant quarters). There is a choir
here & don't know whether to blow
it out or blow it up. Less & less
to hold onto but more & more to do, be
done. If that doesn't stretch the point
too far. Going cold turkey or lukewarm
tongue. Not my language—just a lot of
luggage—but no use jettisoning the fading
with eau de cologne. Not my handle—
just a lot of tags on bags of baggage
that look
none too familiar. Then everybody
drops from sight & all the
wrong things said repeat themselves like
so many masquerades you can't pull
yourself out of. & screaming down
the hall without any signs of cause.
Pleading for hope when hope was just
the problem. Or should I throw a pie
in your face? (Pronoun slips on banana.)
—Michael writes of sun, but all I can think
of is sunsickness, too much in the sun
never a daughter. As if God's
light still shone on we who have shaded

our eyes. A few phrases remain,
but the drift is vanish. No way out
& no way in—straight call to blast.
Adrift on stage for all to view—
the cringe, the sigh, the curvilinear
elide. The scholar-trancemaker hangs
from the end of a trope and asks
to be cut down. An umbilical cord
signifies no less. Yet despite, I can now see
or is it all
a mistake? & does it splatter?
The important thing is the sweep by which
the specific is hampered
on its way to the
laundry. The "only objective comment"
lifted from the interrogation, then fingered
in this historical fantasy some have undertaken
to get out of. & so our
Reviewer can state that his false assertions
are "absolutely true" & "patently true" even
in the face of being absolutely false &
patently misleading. *Facts are a dime a*
dozen but opinions are like pearls. Society's
sailed amid so many stuffed shirts. The road
redelivers the redaction. Yet form can contain
almost nothing, just enough. & bursts
onto the floor waving & jumping up &
down. Sleighbells of an anticipated foreclosure
chiming at a frequency beyond reach
yet driving to distraction all the
same; which is to say
without goal & undecidable
expectation—can't even say
toward—& naming the passage time or

placelessness. Getting in bed with promise
& waking up with make-believe.
Fortunately impecunious, at least on a
materials level. Floor board, window
pane, ceiling fan, . . . *Cold* as a cow
with a long tail going to confession, *crazy*
as a one-legged chair at an ass-kicking contest,
nervous as wet fog, *silly* as a bedbug
in a brass bra, *smelly* as a white man
on election day, *I* enters the canvas.
Then what would you know the meaning
of? Hard as honey, white as flint, loud
as the snow, dumb as mud. . .There
be another horizon, boots on bay, time
left for every day. It's not as if
it hasn't been said before or won't be
said another time, but never quite
the same. Soft as midnight, clear as
dead. . .With the radio you always
turn this sort of thing off & now you're
p(l)aying for it. Floating entirely
inside the dump, unmaking proportion
in small-mouthed widgets encapsulated
astride phantom departures. Slow &
sullen; fast & nasty. [Please do not turn
page until completion of song.] For which I
languish, in thousand lacerations entangled.
Demark wave, implosion of what
is vapor. Days stifling of cork &
circles of music, sordid front mounted, enlarged
trembling like spectre of corpses adorned
(absorbed). & the fissures
elevate themselves & grunt
& the savor forces its

effects. Like as to as & what to what remains.
Me won voice. Me other is:
An objection: haze of the subject
brought to a locus.
An aberration: filter as creator—aspire
to what is dejectedly broken
occasionally the inflection of meteoric
& terminal vagueness.
Everything marked, no need to fence.
Sopping hard & alike as
a fiddle & a dive. A simple no
that knows no answer. *& if he say* cut off their
hands, then he shall have his tongue cut out.
But revenge is for cues &
plates (tools &
states), defiance for the rest who wait
& are willing. For what
you may learn is that by going
down into the secrets of your
own crimes you descend
into the secrets of all
mimes (minds). Anyway:
some other. Worlds
hourly changing
sparring with cause to an
unknowable end. Asking
no less, demanding no
more.

RON PADGETT

M'SIEUR TARZAN

There comes a point at which you have to sit back and let things unroll according to their own sweet will. You can put on your best suit—a nice dark brown wool—crisp white shirt, and snappy tie, slick back your cowlick in the polished mirror, adjust your shoulder holster, align your cuff links, and go lilting out the door toward a star-spangled evening, but if you're deep in the heart of the African jungle you're in for a surprise. Your house got towed away. You forgot to put money in the meter. As you drift deeper into the undergrowth, you hear, louder and louder, great numbers of trumpets, and it hits you right between the eyes: this is where all those Louis Armstrongs come from! Such a discovery would not have been possible had you insisted on champagne and the tawny slope of a shoulder that night.

Next slide. The shoulder had its own adventure, too. It dipped into a soft monkey fur that sank back into the plush leather back seat of a Rolls Royce that went in all four directions at once, it was so fine an instrument of travel. Voyage I think they call it. "We voyaged across an ocean of currency and when we floated in to our destination the coastline spread its distances under a sky bathed in hues softer than anyone's dream of a cloud, but when we stepped ashore the trees turned jagged and great wild hair waved in the gathering darkness. I went straight to the hotel and had room service send up an urn of iced pearls. It was then I noticed that—how shall I put it—the other end of the room had been erased. I mean there was. . .just nothing there. And when I went toward it I got smaller, and when I went through it I got to be you." Next slide.

Not everyone can afford a mobile home. Or even a mobile dollhouse, in which the dolls wear goggles and bow down before images of Barney Oldfield. In one image Barney is seen squirting

some oil from an oil can onto the arm of an old lady who was later identified as his grandmother, a stately gentlewoman who claimed to have sewn the first flag ever to fly over the jungle just outside the dollhouse. Barney wants to examine the rooms, see what's there, and maybe wash up before dinner. The bathroom is wonderful, all gleaming white tile and pink and blue bars of light coming through the windows painted on the far wall. Pretty soon Barney's in the shower singing up a storm that sends down ripping bolts of lightning that execute the great race driver then and there: he is found dead in the tub. Sic transit authority. Next slide.

You are six years old. Let's see, that would be in 19—. That's my favorite year, 19—. It is like my favorite author, Anonymous. Anonymous was born in —— and died in —— and is still alive, like the other archetypes. They have it pretty easy, those archetypes. Big houses and cars and moonlight and things that money can't buy, like air and pain and Johnny Weismuller. But I have Johnny Weismuller, have him in my sights at this very moment, as he steps off a high ledge and sweeps like a maniac through the trailing vines, dressed in his best suit, a nice dark brown wool.

1

A yellow apple could be a small hollow in stone that flows over and over,
a yellow not in a thing, since it vanishes in the dark, while a thing remains unchanged.
The person the feeling is about may remain unchanged, as the person becomes visible to you.
When you see leaves in a jar against a pink wall, your door opens onto a pink wall,
chlorophyll effervescing in a leaf, a feeling of light. If I have that person already,
that makes me partly unaware of the person, as if I meant some far-off stars, and I were myself
identical with my deep thought that already knows them. I am trying to find out how I
already mean stars, by making this harmonizing light in this room next to a pink room, my remote thought.

2

There is a sieve of small funerary ideas in the air, through which the chlorophyll of a leaf flies.
You fly through a tunnel, and see light on factory windows, as if an iridescent pane of glass
were the shadow of a leaf of your feeling about the person. How will my eye take in the texture
of nature at the edge of the leaf, as what things that go on in my mind can conform to,
unless it's another mind, of a woman in fox leggings, on a golden pane of glass, as in a meditation?
Each point along the edges of her fur might have a roundness, as full as the top of blue sky
above the leaves, or more so. Not the weight, but gold details the contingency, her senses,
scooped out in the back, and constantly patching seams through which her feeling may pass,
what the body stands in front of, a foot turned up, like a bowl with little curls on the lid.

3

This gold will supply a backbone: a relation of the factual hold between a feeling and an object
in reality, whether he knows it holds or not, and what can hold between a feeling and a non-existing object
or person, a spine whose nature is exhausted by how it appears, and a light whose nature is not.
There would be an entity in the world connected to your use of the person, by the relation of your meaning
that invisible guard of blonde hairs at the edges of the entrance to his pink ear, really
talking about a glowing quince. I am not talking about a real quince that is glowing
against the foliage in front of a pink house at dusk, like an owl decoy in foliage.

4

Nothing will explicate non-instrumental goodness or his non-functional beauty.
That we have such questions as truth or goodness which float free of all justifications in him, is how
I understand my mind will make a tool without a tool of the emotion, such as limbs to wings,
yellow leaves along a bone. She is telling her husband, they pop on and off like lights over
a drifting desert, concealing it. Too much light effervesces into a feeling of decomposition,
the foliage of a tree in front of her own house in the sun, moving a time through a thing.
Even if I dream I see this light, this in me I call a feeling.
Between it and the light outside would be a seam. That the two feel smooth is the entity,
a kind of transfer, as what you are trying to refer to of the foliage. A leaf can fold over,
lifting a skin of the leaf and placing it here, in front of the light turquoise mountain,
here, in the small of his back in the heat, where blue wasps are sipping.

DAVID BROMIGE

from BY DRAWING A LINE *and* A SET OF TWELVE

YOU

"Even my feelings don't
represent me." And he turned
to me, and kept on turning.

Who says that part, that narrative?
Which doesn't represent me either
alleges someone else

who could be. Then the correction
tape must be inserted
just when I'm at my most impatient,

yet able to perceive this
conjunction and offer it
as an example. I worry

that my writing is too
deliberate, for someone
who gets there ahead of

myself. An excuse opts out
my lips: I write it out
to see it steadily, not

elsewise capable of so
noticing what it is I do,
that's why these little

units too. I show it to you
in case there's somewhat
of me in you, since loneliness

can be terrible. The clusters
I let sounds make make
consistency into identity

to stand for me. But my neck
is stiff, now, although it
hadn't been. I can't reach it

myself. So I would set an idea
between us, you and me, and be
you, turning into it, and it is

words, for an image
considers money changing hands
that is minted some third place,

changing the hands that handle it.
Why argue that a poem must be
personal—reducing variety to that

aggrandizing formula? It's just my
requirement. The Misty Mountains
hover above the lovely lake

locates the brimming city.
Forget that—the rock
washed down sits on

itsshelf I remember to write
despite the tape went haywire
at the stanza-break. Real time

is commentary on process?
I appear to think this
so suggest alternatives,

marmoreal, a joining up
of notebook entries
to be another nature. Your

manifest substantiality
must be some guarantee
to me. Don't leave me

here—I'll give you
an experience of your life,"
where this must stand for that,

sentences be
abilities transcending
interruption, interruptions

some guarantee we're real.
But why these sentences
and why must they be me—you

perhaps should not be
troubled on this matter.
Perhaps: the element of chance

the near side of a fact.
The thing in the trap
still gorged with other

destination. A seriously
inflated tableau
to ring the curtain down

if "all the world's a stage"
preludes discovery
that's not the case. Music

must be the case
yet isn't. One
types one's type

idiosyncratically
twisting. Apparent discourse
fails to give you space.

YOU

A vocabulary
that anticipates
action on my part
is never all the case.

Walls bend.
To the blast
letters create
in quiet space.

Once they were large
and you were small
and change
stays hard to see.

A vocabulary
that anticipates
action on my part
is now the case.

Fashionable arrangements
flatter, familiar
sequences predicted
by the ancestors

clarify the insult.
Subject to a change
that qualifies as
liquidation

gasps for means
and evolution
chokes. Recall
life and *art*—

those infant twins
a sow ate one of,
and the one who lived
was never sure?

An anecdote to smudge
thought's figure.
And thought to fudge
its issue. This is you.

CHOICE

The Way of Geometry

And there are three ways
through the marshes

The Way of Sainthood

Impossible to know
which of the three men
on the deck at sunset

There is the gaze off into the distance
but that is a pose

There are the "marshes"
a regional matter

or a reasonable affair
or as in selecting one
from a basket of gourds

She sang in the bath

Then there is the silver pipe
with a guard or filter on top

The sum of the hypotenuse
The song of the river-horse

Of the three figures, one is
dapper, and faces us

"We waited nine months"
as in "common" or "lot"

His shadow cast against the door
The door somewhat ajar
and the sense of being trapped

A bad time to sneeze
or the seals to go
in the transmission

Who held the camera
or the protractor
She must have been very beautiful

when there were four ways

and he played the piano so thrillingly
This is about setting-out

the deck of cards, the hands and faces
and how it seems night
the light artificial

and something unnamed
though known

as another way, those trees
spindly and profuse
with blue among them

And the triangle
a diamond in the lake

Blue and black at each apex

yet merely dark
at one, the one
beneath the shoe

red to begin with, redder
in that sun

A SET OF TWELVE

It to experience

Might be the first
past
part of something
ahead it
presents

1.

It must be impossible
no, it must seem so

and the difference

why bother then

but the difference

a kind of remainder

of what would be forgotten

can't use this
for anything

or anything else

2.

These parts stuck together
that were once wholes

how human
can we get

over the gap

without the sad remnant

~~left~~ for the gods
that were once parts

and what about stuck
that gets the attention

and what about deserves
and what about deserves

that what preserves
but us

what about us

3.

A picture tapes thought

of a flapping hand
manicly finally

trying to discard the tape

a person can get it all
but not the one who thinks it

out of the system

and what about system

impossible

then there's someone
posed beside that

whod leave nothing behind

A positioning
of its opposite
not even that

a poisoning
of the atmosphere

stuck together

4.

Love fallen into
puts a pit or a pool
where a person was

and is

two

a fiction

a comfort

that must be impossible

that temptation

the remainder resists
its insistence

sticky surface

violent invisible collisions

reminding of somewhat

can help come
in the shape
one's in

a soft spot
in an obdurate

word one hadn't
handled quite
this way

if before has time in it

for what about way

5.

Given
a time like this

and naturally
one feels elation

from here a sentence
winds downhill

behind the picture

refused

depicts refusal

among all one was
wanted to be

now refuse
if the sound is the dump

that is ugly

Given beauty
like this

the wind up the hill
turns ugly

6.

1
"My life had stood
a loaded gun"
there it is
in the corner
of

but like that

I like that

but that is not
what makes the trigger
fingered

a contradiction
in a cave

stuck together

for approval

rent
for approval
for rent

A life had
to live

and what is
after
all

2

The world approves
Why else were you here

And
you are here

and the world

had stood in the
some term
Meantime

7.

The gift
that might be
ambiguous

is a present
that will be
unwrapped

symmetrical
agreement

stuck together
for approval

something else
that is apart

that is a part

if there's a whole
before the predicate

the hand withdraws

somewhat has been left
over in time as position

a slight weight
or diminishing acoustic

ruling out one

ruled in

8.

Lifted

the object
weighed
texture

~~Un~~expected

Judgment
and no further
persuasion

prevails

9.

Irrelevant

What you think

in these conditions

of age, race, nation, class
or health

however diagnosed

"mental" "physical"

But the language
Is this irrelevant?
Must be
but isn't

as the rest
and their pictures

actions, fist through canvas

a hand that might open
with its lines
that are names

10.

Accretion
includes error

Memory
disposes

The difference
from that which one

demonstrates
but which one

indubitably
doubts

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1

Ends
A sense of such

for a system
one wields wields one

Weariness
irrelevant

"human"
a consolation
abrupting

with its definition
the defining

2

"Human" blue
height of
"a port in. . . ."

and the threads then
leading in
and elsewhere

Now are you a monster
mister memory-man and
miss memory-woman

Objection
irrelevant

with its hands
The verbs
"turning the pages"
preserving same

"I had air my lungs could breathe"
A possible statement
But statement

remainders

12.

Misspelled
or at variance

to think times
apparently blank space

"Total articulation
. . .that must be impossible"

settles
for less

Hey that's okay
street shouts

But disposition
has always died

in the eye
it puts out

The site
i tup sets

Between be and seem
the irony, the word
for the experience
of the word

for the experience

TED JENNER

Chorus Girls

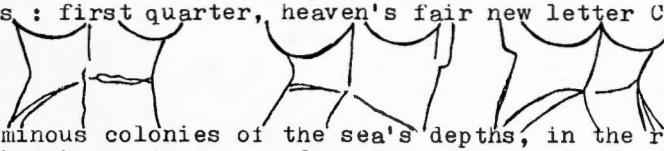
2

A Brief History of the Muses

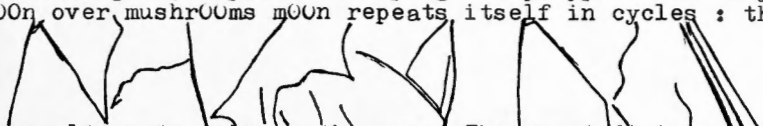
[Note: In a lecture entitled 'Feminism and Italian Avant-Garde Art', Giulia Nicolai spoke of a secret alphabet in pre-literate Greece linked to the months of the year and invented by certain priestesses of the Moon long before the Greeks modified the Phoenician symbols. Starting point. I have identified these priestesses with their mythical counterparts, the Muses, of whom there were originally three (of Song, Dance & Poetry), later nine with multiplication in the various departments of Arts and Sciences. I am never aware of these lunar symbols at the tip of my pen, but draw on those who were: the Greek poet Aischrion ('moon, the sky's beautiful new sigma') and e.e. cummings ('mOOn Over tOwn mOOn'). For the 'Rockettes', see Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York.]

A Brief History of the Muses

a chain of molecules arranged in a certain order, and thanks to the mere fact of having an order, she had only to float in the midst of the disorder and immediately around her other chains were formed. (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : first quarter, heaven's fair new letter C.) But in

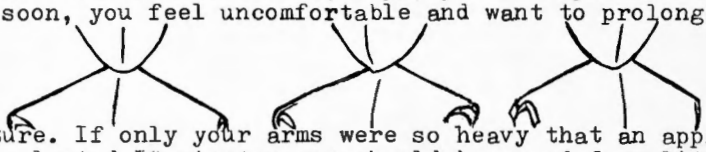


the luminous colonies of the sea's depths, in the ribbons of kelp that began to emerge from the soft crust of embryonic continents, every now & then a swarm broke loose only to divide once again, repeat that sponge or polyp whence they came - mOOn over mushrOOms mOOn repeats itself in cycles : the

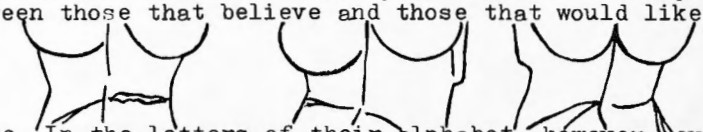


phases alternate, always the same. The great division within living beings had begun. (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : full moon, heaven's fair new letter O.) Strictly through the mechanisms of tortoise-shell lyres and prosody, in a mirror-fingered dawn, the virgins reproduced them-

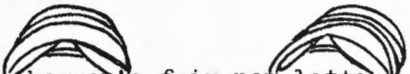
selves mOOn over tOwers mOOn. But between the part that transmits the orders of reproduction and the part that carries them out an irreconcilable gap has opened and they speak: 'Your sentence over, boys, you feel you have finished too soon, you feel uncomfortable and want to prolong the



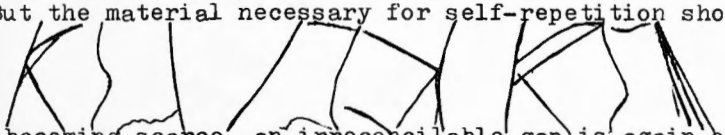
gesture. If only your arms were so heavy that an appreciative sweep lasted IO minutes, we should be saved from literature.' (Their periods were heaven's fair new letters : half moon, heaven's fair new letter D.) By now the battle is joined between those that believe and those that would like to be-



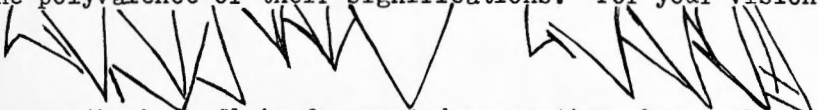
lieve. In the letters of their alphabet, however, everything has been registered: the stage is magically cleared of debris and the reborn Rockettes assume their traditional formations mOOn over tOwn mOOn. Strictly through the effects of architecture, in a mirror-clad dorm, the virgins reproduce them-



selves, heaven's fair new letters, last quarter, heaven's fair new letter ☽ suddenly breaks loose - could it be the gentle curve of their eyebrows in international hotel lobbies or the soft chime of their circumflex accents in airport bars ? But the material necessary for self-repetition shows signs



of becoming scarce, an irreconcilable gap is again opening between us, they cancel the last bold letter at the first quarter of the new moon, substitute (all phases apparent) ☽ , heaven's fair new asterisk, and accuse us of misinterpreting the polyvalence of their significations. 'For your vision has



become the housefly's fragmented perception, boys; thus we restore you to your freedom: call it the distance between your multiple footnotes and our whole configuration.' So we were left with mOOn Over fOOtnOtes mOOn as our letters repeat themselves in cycles, the phases alternate, always the same.

HAYDEN CARRUTH

TWO POEMS

FIGMENT

For not often in our loves the moment of transubstantiation
lifts love to the crown of moonlit snow in the great
spruce forest, sparking there,
but they, our loves, go mundanely on in the exploring
excitation
of nerve endings, so insinuated it brings
tears melting in our sentimental eyes, gasps and throes,
and this is our weakness, for which in the end we pay, we
suffer,
we agonize in the torture rooms
of the erotic prison where our bodies break down, sinew by
sinew,
in the fevers of love.
My dear, in our spruce woods, warm in the snow, we ascend
to the crystalline crowns, borne on the tiny snowy crosses,
for we are imagined ones, you imagined by me and I by you,
and neither knows the how of the other.
But we know we are pure. Only imagined loves and lovers
have this purity, this detachment from weakness and brain
disease,
and you in my vision of you are, in imagination's
eternal moment for however long or briefly we in our
nevertheless
piggish capacities for glory can hold the vision intactly,
the goddess of love stepping from the shell
of the wind-swept hollow in the waves of snow,
pristine and glowing with sexual magnanimity.
What you see of me there on my knees is a grace in which

I participate momently and gratefully,
so sprawled not in the desire to be taken but in the desire
to be made real where I am loverly.
Oh my beautiful, see how the moonflash pirouettes
on the gleaming crucifixions of the spruce boughs
laden with snow. We are transcensions in ourselves,
in our musky, delicious sex and blood, true in this that the
others
try to blow away with a poof-paff. Come to me. We have
known
the truth of poetry for a long time and now know
the truth of love without a medium, without any substance
but our love itself.
Kiss me, snuggle to me, hold my penis,
let me kiss all your body, yes, here in the snow, it cannot chill
us,
this so unlikely place, this imagined place
with its owls and icicles, its hardy beech leaves fluttering
on the snow like mice scratching in a nest, my hand nestling
in you so warm until you die, my poor Yankee hand
that knows practical wisdom, the morality of the real,
now in the lifelong fantasy of scaling the treacherous peaks
alone with you.

CATALOGUE

In the upper atmosphere the ozone layer is partly destroyed, which permits the penetration of ultra-violet rays to the earth's surface.

In Montana are distinct pre-indications of a high Gobi-like desert.

On the Jersey shore continual wastes drift on the beaches, sewage, industrial contaminants, even the hideous detritus of

hospitals. This is becoming more and more evident also in other coastal regions, including the Pacific.

Carbon monoxide and other pollutants fall in the rain on New York and New England, destroying sugar maples and swamp maples faster than they can replenish themselves.

In the Amazonian basin, using huge machines, loggers of mahogany, purpleheart, and other exotic timber are destroying the rain forest that produces a large part of the oxygen necessary for life on earth.

Cancer is epidemic, it is in everyone; George Dennison is dead, Ray Carver is dead, Joel Oppenheimer is gravely ill.

The hottest, most sultry summer on record in North America has killed 1500 people simply from dehydration and exhaustion. Some inhabitants recognize that the same thing on a much larger scale has occurred in parts of the world to which they do not normally give much attention.

The extinction of species—say again, the extinction of species—continues at a daily measurable rate.

The exhaustion of unrenewable fossil fuels will occur at a calculable moment not far in the future.

Dead porpoises ooze up at the seaside every day in large numbers.

Gannets, gulls, sea ducks, and other waterfowl are strangled when their necks are caught in the holes of plastic fasteners from six-packs of beer and soda.

Starvation has spread into the vicinities of the wealthy.

The depth of topsoil in Iowa, estimated to have been ten to twelve feet at one time, even twenty in some places, is now five inches; the remainder is diminishing annually.

Only a few remote aquifers reveal no toxic elements.

General levels of mercury, sodium, sulfate, and PCBs continue to increase in all ecosystems.

Will it ever end? Of course. Of course it will end.

DOREN ROBBINS

TWO POEMS

DRAWN TO AND CONFOUNDED

Now, after all, without filters, without the prop of inactments; the transformative routine an unavailable fiction; without the watery bond of it. . .So long mistold to myself, mispictured to my judgements; the myth of it exploded, the myth of it exploded itself a myth. . .Revived, momentarily unitable; comfort now would be retrograde—how much I envy black! Clearest depth and dilapidated vineyards. . .I stand by my unpredictable stabilities; into the absorption of what I am lowered in to I steer, I am the connoisseur of only that. . .What I am denied of, not worthy of, betrayed over, praised for, is all sentimentalism; an indulgence of the absence of not seeing deeper. Suffering has its compilations. Resolution has its compilations. Parallel spasms, blocked migrations, instances of illuminations—for me there are fewer balances, fewer instances, than verdurous trapdoor intervals between the extremes. . .the road produces and destroys. And I am drawn to it as I am drawn to and confounded by the Essence of Mind Hui Neng spoke of, which is neither created nor can it be annihilated. How can this be? But how can it not be and still be thought? Illuminations, I said, but that is only a name given to it, and all of the high names of attainment are arrogance—since the name of the precision past lucidity, and when the name of the meeting past continuance, and also if the name of the rarity past conclusion, all lead to the defeated resonance. . .past fertility.

NOT

Not bridges, not the reciprocity of the dew, or the putrefaction of opposites; not the celestial gate or the ĕnchanted ground, the predawn preillumined interiors or the incessant depressions' sway; not the permeable door or the lasting ground; not the mood under the wreck unspoken or the perturbed echolalia; not bridges, not the nondiscovery of rarities, the syntax harp mutistic, the step in charted through moth dung and smoke; not the butcher's scale, the dressmaker's mirror, the falsified dose, the painted over error. Not the fiction with accomplices; not Nachman either in the Castle of Transformations, not the doctor in the stone tower pleading it is the manifestation of the occupant; not the conceit of bridges, not the verbal spermicide of it, the insecticidal prattlists that maintain it, the right-brain-hobbyists that pander to it; not these views either—all blatantly unaware of some other slander, some other conceit, prattle, disparaging grind, mishap, allowable horror, or disgrace; not this individual factual gloom, pitfall, whining interior, or fortitude, or proficience, or rarity of craft; the extreme tolerable only to one who has surpassed the desire or outlasted the compulsion to live extremely; not the romance of bridges—ruses against being caught in the act, against establishing the unguarded act, the potentially dislikable act, and the act dismissed at the instant of the proof of each actuality. . .I cross the gelatinous foundations, and the births of flies, correspondences half reached, or consumated, or left off from; I drag an invisible beam, an inflamed precision emerging. . .but not bridges, I am oppressed by boundaries predetermined, and bridges.

SEAN KILLIAN

THREE POEMS

BLINDFOLD, WOOLY CAPE AND SHOES OF LEAD

Behind our scenarios
is the real life,
whatever is real
in it somehow
unsignable and lost
though the ruins
of its architecture
often accost
a building detachment.

Can I even whistle
a stretch of it,
how it tumbled up
from scattered stone
and said tower, tower,
reproducing content and context
in one upthrust, laying
the land low, with a kind of mercy?

Still, you look out,
afraid, incumbent,
hardly like your remains
or your efflorescence—
whatever they were—and
the reddish drift of your heart
may lift cuecards to the sun—
don't dance if every fragile wrong

won't drive sunspots batty.
On occasion, you get the
drift, atop your directorate,
your art, your hissing
rose-petals piled into a
select spindle of Babylonish
bliss (or would-be bliss).

The whole thing gets
desiccate, and the collapse
of such stacked stage whispers
is imminent; but don't
stifle your warmth that
might heat up heaven, a
rather cold fish if the
starlight be landed. And
instead of any monument,
there is, of course, an obstacle
course somehow vertical toward
the sky's unseeable apex.
And in that shooting in the air
is the lifeblood spilled
for some absurd reach,
past any aim, past known target.
It's a warning, heeded or not,
that one might yet get to the bull's-eye.

JUICES OF RUBATO
(STOLEN TIME)

Will distance scorch
what we've come to believe,
the boo-fed truth

already shortened
because the search has gone on
for its big bravos
and come to nought?

Lies are a stricter beat
than ever, the kind
of rumbling in the mouths
that might be a flight
of hairtriggers afraid
of the gunning sun.
And the shock of the semiautomatic moon.

Or shall I nose the stolid bride
to more nuance, more delightful cloud,
her thunders my kind,
my lightning her stripe?
My intended was fractionally mine
till I featured her in a blue streak,
cocking all ears for intimacy.
The piano, tonight, is a serpentine mound
but who minds? Who sounds?

The stairway has bannisters of char
and a newel of blackened stump;
I'll lie in wait, knowing the muse
can only reign for short instants,
cool instants. One can be levelheaded
though an advocate of scrollwork
and defiant maze. My scoresheet
burns with bouquets, hoping to anthologize
our speech, like some signature piece
passed along as latent belonging.

The live, uneclipsable salamander
stirs from the black chords
of memory and the fountain
is no longer cistern; you
can count the beats

it takes for it
to turn into flicker of fire
and steal the music.

Some actress burns
in tandem with her
unseen vigilance;
and minor victory is
merely new lapse;
you can collapse in
her awkward arms and
ask for more than
you paid for but the
debt will get enormous,
deficit already possessed
by its own flaccidity.

It's only safe to say little,
to stay within limits,
named but brighter
than a name. The climb
into that quiet is never short
of failure but we must
play one more ardency and
argue over the remains,
the ruses of love. There is
a place where you refrain
from telling me how intimacy
can ice, ice-over, gaining ground
and soon covering the earth in a colder age.

YOU'RE (HISTORY)!

A monolith,
such as you
are, is worn
down, like
some scaled
stadia reduced
from seating
to saturated
ruin; and marks
clamp like teeth
till the scars are
too great and
identity tumbles,
some unlettered
tombstone, some
timbre of erasure
which has already heard
from chasmal enemies
on the last of tiers.
Scoriae of catcalls!
Scamper of rats!
And the pillars sag
till stylites sit
on rumbling ground,
thinking temblors
are calls from a new divinity
though spectacle has devoured
even the turgid amphitheatre of any Great Seer.
And one must suck on a sucking stone.

JACKSON MAC LOW

ONERS N TENNERS 3

from *Descriptive Mentality from the Head, Face and Hand*
by Holmes W. Merton (1899)

Ordinary. Your Form is large enough for ordinary purposes. By training it would enable you to become a good mechanic. You could become a good mechanic if you so desired. Good. Desired. Training. Large. Mechanic. Enough.

Eyes strong and observing (unless injured by overwork): vivid expression.

Concise.

You should study that which is of value to you. Apply yourself steadily to studying one vocation valuable to you. Steadily. Vocation. Study a vocation of value to you, applying yourself steadily. Value. Yourself. Application. Steady application to studying one vocation is valuable to you. You should apply yourself steadily to studying a valuable vocation.

Amity.

From the Faculty of Inspiration arise Aesthetics, Symbolism, and Adornment. Principal organ for pathologist, author, magician, seer, symbolist, or ethicist. Aesthetics. Ethics. Magic. Inspiration yields Aesthetics and Adornment for magician, pathologist, and seer. The principal organ for magicians, authors, and pathologists is Inspiration.

You strongly desire to gain mental strength from new discoveries.

Ethical.

Attention.

You have great natural philanthropy, begrudging no one's honest success.

Sublime. Religion should be full of life, warm, sunny, and genial. Morality. Religion. True or false, it is a good way to live. Infinity. Sunny. Good. Infinity's worship is sublime when morality and religion are one. A warm, sunny religion, true or false, is good morality.

Large faculties of Form, Color, and Attention greatly aid Inspiration. Delicate thought, reading, and communion with nature augment small Inspiration. Commune with the beautiful, read refining literature, study the arts. We cultivate Inspiration by communing with nature and thinking delicately. Literature. Studying the arts cultivates Inspiration through Form, Color, and Attention. Attention. Habitual delicate thought and reading refining standard literature cultivate Inspiration. Help Form's, Color's, and Attention's faculties by communing with nature. Communion.

Unsystematic.

Careful of wealth and property, you're open-handed, generous, when needed. Your medium Faculty of Economy lets you aid the deserving. Economy. Generous. If the deserving need your wealth and property, you're open-handed. Generous to the deserving needy, you take care of property. When you think it deserved, you open your hands generously. Deserving. Careful. Through medium Economy you're generally careful of wealth, carefully generous.

Will's faculties yield executive and dynamic powers: civil, financial, productive.

From the Faculty of Liberty arise Freedom, Equality, and Independence.

Seldom demonstrating self-approbation, egotism, self-esteem, you're disapproving rather than commending.

Vague. With mental pictures vague, indistinct, you don't notice the inconspicuous. You do not notice what is not directly referred to. Indistinct. Conspicuous. Pictures. Notice. Directly. With a small Faculty of Form, you don't notice much. Only seeing the conspicuous, your mental pictures are vague and indistinct.

You have a warm, genial friendship and express it buoyantly.

Language.

You're a good judge of distance, locality, and visible motions. Locality. Motions. Distance. Through very large Faculty of Form you judge visibles well. Distances, localities, and visible motions are what you judge best. You make correct judgments about visible motions, distances, and places. Judge. Your very large Faculty of Form judges well whatever's seen. Form.

Spiritual things have more of emotional quality than intellectual perception. You can't be reasoned into changing opinions generally considered religious. Spiritual. For you spiritual matters are generally more emotional than intellectual. Religious. Perception. Reason. Opinion. Your religious opinions are not subject to change through reasoning. Emotion.

You are not much interested in the government of children.

From the Faculty of Integrity arise Rights, Duty, and Penalties.

Your very large Faculty of Hope influences those around you.

The Faculty of Language's studies are Grammar, Speaking, and Music.

Study. Irksome. Practice. Harmonies. Musician. Though appreciating music, you'd find constant study and practice irksome. Attractive. Necessary. Musicians' constant practice would be irksome

though harmonies are attractive. How irksome it would be to practice and study constantly!

Expressions.

Life-forces. Living. Organs. Impressions. You don't sense the life-forces of living things around you. Discovery. Things. You depend upon other organs for their discovery and impressions. Sense. Dependence.

You've no disposition to ideal creations in the practical arts.

You pay little attention to parental feelings and heredity's influence.

Contempt. Contumely. Your contempt demands you heap contumely on what it dislikes. Failing. Accomplishment. Not accomplishing its end, it seeks solitude to recuperate energy. Your contempt arises from your very large Faculty of Aversion. Contemptuous, you speak and act rudely toward all you dislike. Solitude. You retreat to solitude when thwarted in expressing your contempt.

Country. Criticize. You're more apt to criticize than praise your own country. Only moderately patriotic, you don't worship your country's past achievements. Praise. Critical rather than worshipful, you hardly ever praise your country. Past. You seldom praise your country and don't worship its past. You criticize your country when others might be praising it. Worship.

You judge the future more through reason than through intuition.

From the Faculty of Hope arise Reclamations, Improvements, and Undertakings.

Parenity.

Communion.

Eyes.

Your nature cannot bear antagonism or discord, but craves harmony. Discord. You crave harmonic social life and growth rather than discord. Antagonism and discord are unbearable to a nature craving harmony. You have a harmony-craving nature, shunning social antagonism and discord. Harmonious social life and growth is what you want most. Harmonic. Since you can't stand discord, you always seek social harmony. Naturally you prefer harmony and try to resolve social contradictions. Nature.

Defence. Orderwork. From the Faculty of Defence arise Orderwork, Machinery production, Textiles. Machinery. Textiles, Orderwork, and Machinery production express the Faculty of Defence. Production. Studies. Arising. Departments and studies from Defence: Machinery production, Textiles, and Orderwork. Departments.

In Mental Temperament the nervous system is strongest, Intellect predominant.

Beautiful. Natural. Nearly all natural objects' forms, colors, or actions are beautiful. Careful observation of natural objects will add to your pleasure. The actions, colors, and forms of natural things are beautiful. Observation. It will please you greatly to observe natural objects carefully. Pleasure. Action. Color.

Your muscular system is not powerful in proportion to size. Your backhead's nerve force is not powerful and soon exhausted. Climate. You would find constant change in business or location wearing. Nature. Backhead. Nerve. Cultivation. Your endurance would be much modified by our adverse climate. Adverse.

Small Will and vital temperament yield romantic and idealistic thought. Very Large Invention and small Will may produce visionary literature. Nature. Vital. Poetry combines Very Large Invention, small Will, and vital temperament. Your romantic turn comes from Very Large Invention, Small Will. Expression. Visionary. You're disposed toward romantic, idealistic thought, and visionary literary work. Idealistic.

Your memory often fails you; your past is disconnected, confused. Information. Laborious. Slow. You gain special information by slow and often laborious steps. Your memory's no good and you gain information with difficulty. Special.

Steps. Memory. Disconnected.

You're much disposed to acquire wealth and spend it economically. You like to be credited with commercial shrewdness and ability. Wealth. Your Large Faculty of Economy makes money and spends it shrewdly. Economy. Credit. Spending wealth economically, you like being called shrewd, commercially able. Disposed. Expenditure. Acquisitive and economical, you've a reputation for shrewd commercial ability.

You wouldn't find it difficult to be agreeable in society.

Mental. If of mental temperament, you'll care little for feminine companionship. Temperament. Men of Small Devotion, mental temperament, marry for convenience, necessity. Convenience. You'll marry for convenience or necessity not for feminine companionship. Marriage results from convenience or necessity for men with Small Devotion. Feminine. With Small Devotion and mental temperament you'll marry for convenience. Companionship.

Formative.

Indications of poor texture and quality, numerous, need little description. Quality. Texture. Numerous. Poor. There are very many indications of poor texture and quality. Marked. Shifting eyes, coarse skin, ungraceful, unresponsive movements, indicate Poor Quality. Poor. Nerve force lacks strength and tone, is dull, indirect, cloudy. Personal Expression in those of Poor Quality usually lacks meaning.

Enthusiasm. Repression. Beauty. You feel more enthusiasm for beauty than you can express. With Medium Inspiration, you quietly repress your enthusiasm for beauty. Unable to express them,

you repress your feelings for beauty. When you encounter beauty, you quietly repress inexpressible enthusiasm. Nature. You feel more enthusiasm for beauty than you can express. You quietly repress somewhat of your natural enthusiasm for beauty.

Parenity. With Very Large Parenity, you abound in tenderness for children. You easily take children's attention: they do as you desire. Charm. Congeniality. Your congenial tenderness charms children into doing what you want. Your Faculty of Parenity being very large, you charm children. Children do as you want because of your abundant tenderness.

Attention. Abundance.

Benevolence.

Algebra.

Your touch, far from acute or sensitive, requires much practice.

With very large Reason, Construction, Defence, Form, you worship nature. Having but Small Hope, you anticipate no pleasures of immortality. Success. Nature. Physical. You hope, not for immortality, but success in this life. Reason. Worshipping nature's physical forces, your hope lies in worldly success. You will worship nature and have no hope for immortality. Nature and her physical forces are your objects of worship.

Self-contained, blunt in expressing opinions, you don't heed others' opinions.

You quickly notice others' thoughts and motives from their motions.

Arbitrary. Older. As you grow older, your opinions will probably grow arbitrary. New discoveries change the viewpoint from which we view the universe. All men may well be wrong or only partially right. Simpleness. It is best to impart scientific knowledge through simple statements. Perfect. Face. Avoid arbitrary opinions since new discoveries may change one's viewpoint.

Needs. Character. Other people's natures and needs do not impress you strongly. You gather others' characters from their acts and expressions. Others' characters impress you more than their natures or needs. Having Large Reason, other people's natures don't directly impress you. Other people's acts and expressions lead you to their characters. Nature. Impressions. Acts.

With large observing powers, you insufficiently condense thoughts and observations.

Imagination. Reason. You're apt to turn your art to simple mechanical use. Observation. With Imagination and Reason medium or lower, you just watch. You're inclined to wide observation of objects and passing events. Medium. Mechanical art, broad observation, may result from Very Large Form. Simple. Mechanical.

Poor-quality skin is coarse with poorly marked veins and arteries. The papillary surface of poor skin is coarse and irregular. Coarseness and irregularity is notable on inner surfaces of hands. Irregularity. Coarseness. Tracings of movements in bending surfaces reveal coarse, irregular skin.

Papillary. Surfaces. Hands. Bending.

No halfway manifestation will satisfy your Very Large religious Faith.

Your Hope faculty isn't strong enough for imprudent speculations. Your very large Hope sustains you in seemingly safe speculations. You don't hurry into undesirable speculations despite your Large Hope. Hope. Hardly. Safe. You have Large Hope but not enough to speculate imprudently. Your Hope, though large, doesn't lead you into undesirable speculations. You only speculate when it seems safe, despite Large Hope. Speculation.

With Small Attention, you should study what you value most. You should apply your Small Attention steadily to one vocation. Study what you value most and concentrate on one vocation. Attention. Study. If you value something greatly, apply yourself to studying

it. You, having Small Attention, are only fit for one vocation. Value. Vocation. Application.

Delicate.

Arithmetic.

Body. Brain. Texture and quality of brain and body varies their power. Mentality. Judgment. Observation. Faculties. Organs. Finer texture compared to size gives more power to mentality. Essential.

You pay too little attention to parental feelings and impulses.

Endurance. You very little want constant change of location and business. Labor. Power. Climatic changes would affect your endurance and power to labor. You'd enjoy a constant, more than a moveable, commercial life. You want less to move around than to stay put. Your tenacity and working ability could be hurt by climate. Change. You'd prefer business where you don't change work or place.

Your Large Invention needs strong money-making organs for business success. Finances. Organs. Success. Gains. You'll invent original financial plans leading to clear-cut commercial gains. Very strong money-making organs need the support of Large Invention. Successful business operations may result from large organs of Invention. Your Large Invention will greatly aid working out financial plans. Original ways to make money may result from Large Invention.

Fire. Execution. Direction. Iron. Use. You're liable to have too many irons in the fire. You're apt not to use execution enough in every direction. Liable. Having Small Stability, you may try doing too many things. You don't carry through to completion many projects you begin.

Hope. Awake. You are keenly awake to the higher aspirations of Hope. Beauty. Spirit. having Very Large Hope, you're awake to beauty in life. You feel the tender emotions of religious and

humanitarian growth. You are strongly concerned with the gaining of possible immortality. Your Hope is so strong it influences those around you.

You have Very Large Appetite and digest your food well. You've a supreme sense of hunger when you need nutrition. Hunger. You supply your body with food, and digest it, thoroughly. Appetite. Plenty. Supplies. You make the most of a little food when necessary. Digestion. Body.

You have a fair idea of time and rhythmical motions. Your Large Faculty of Number might assist your musical faculty. You can keep time pretty well and move fairly rhythmically. Through Large Number, you sense time and rhythm tolerably well. Rhythm. Time. With moderately good timing and rhythm, you might make music. Music. You are not the most rhythmic person in the world. When it comes to timing, you might hold your own.

You can entertain an audience by droll stories or manner. Fun. You accord with every propensity to get fun from life. Droll. You can amuse people in public by telling funny stories. Life. Your Large Faculty of Communion helps you to please people. Propensity. Stories. You know how to tell comical tales in comical ways.

Your devotion is of a delicate, tender, and suppliant kind.

Strong minds around you often impress you by their impulses. Repellant. Opposed. Concentrated. Those who impress you may repel you through opposing ideas. The wishes and concentrated thought of strong minds impress you. Strong. Ideas. Opposition. Your Very Large Faculty of Inspiration renders your highly impressionable.

Weird.

Thrown.

Pay attention to concentration of thought and accuracy of statement.

Reason. System. Large Reason makes your ideas systematic, connected, in clear succession. Arrangement. Succession. Connection. Your well-arranged ideas follow each other connectedly, clearly, and systematically. Ideas. Because of your Large Reason your ideas are connected clearly. Thought.

18 March–4 April, 1988, New York

THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

NOV 59

The shadow of the tree runs into her back
at the place where I'm in the womb then
a fallen hand and the father's shadow with
camera held to face her hand resting
on bark one foot forward of swiftly
receding futures coterminous with dark

they who would die standing up
in the life I gave them when originally
there was a cliff and then once more
and again a cliff who you are absolutely sure
is not free of the virus a vow of silence
for moving things like the white slung across

black both of which equal a stunning
if drunk in that is the father
calls and or takes a picture of his wife
with child of him and her and who else
asks itself and knows more than it's telling
or nothing about which this intrudes
on the active sleep of that yard of fluid

sweeping backward to me here
the probability of a lid or hatched border
in the waking situation which could lose
to a far larger as the mother did when the
tree leaned to be touched then fled along
the slope with the sightless black back

of her negative to shoot it
into the matching opacity of brush

up through branches breaks there
show a sky but one the drained
color of her standing
and both will stay will not

flash veins across the body of other veins
(it is not the world)
for which purpose mother and sky
hang bleached in a specificity planted finally
they say only so to each other
and as such are gates

BARBARA JORDAN

BRANCHING

At the pool bottom green jasper, tourmaline, amber,
som tymes the very images of the Starres naturally ingrafted in them,
and others in their perspicuity like water
congealed in sunset's red extravagance;
and he yt hath it in his keeping it will sure preserve him.
I make my hand a spathe to cup the stones
where timelessness hangs in quicksands of cold
and leaves. I tilt my chin to sniff the air,
an animal comforted by privacy
beneath uddered, monumental clouds; choosing this or that
by instinct. The Saxon peasant tilling fields mistook
arrow-heads for snake's tongues, petrified
venom as a talisman. How to define magick? The letter z is its salt
in spell words whispered from Byzantium,
the glossopetra of demons: wind-blown, unearthed among beetroot.

In a garden in Cologne, in a stork's nest, Avicenna
found an "eaglestone"—a cure for childbirth—the place pertinent.
Oh God, who are the tunnel in which we walk,
all things express a thought that was not ours before
we seized it from the air, the forest floor.
Bacon once swallowed crushed pearls and lemon juice
as good for bones.
Vapors seep from earth, the dusk explores its issues in the grass,
and matter forms conspiringly as if it had a will.

Along a path to the Manor House at Tunbridge Wells, badgers had dug
their mounds under the fan tracery of ancient shrubs
and made it ominous, for the walk veered into dank, green
sound chambers, the birthing rooms
of wary creatures. Shall we *sêc lytle stones* in the maw of young swallows—
en swealwan bridda magan?
The air smells of sphagnum moss and fear, the sun
moves in the leaves like a diamond-back.
One wants to pull back fear just to watch the glistening pupae
being carried, a small reflection of anxieties.

A hush sheds over claw and branch,
over speech. The trees make paths too, can mesmerize you with a life's work,
a propendency that beckons up
through scalar coolness, shadows you hack way
to sky—observing leaf-clusters, the texture of a bole—any opening
a foothold to get *under* the diadem
in place to listen. Droplet sounds. Insects buffeting
the curved skin of wood. A neolithic woman
put the forest around her neck: a necklace of fifty teeth—
three of lion, the rest of bear—
to hoard, to stitch into a hem of rain, to make
a voice that did not lie.

PHILLIP FOSS

THE THEATER OF PERFUMES

When did we three last meet?
—S. Beckett, etc.

The floor slopes toward the stage as if
to encourage liquids, or airs, directionally.

With a snake's tongue you desire to smell.

The room is glazed black, its ceiling
excessively high, as in a theater, but
there are no chairs for an assumed audience.

The confluence of her thighs is an exit.
Navigation must, by design, exist in absence
of signs. You have approached innocence
by inhaling between her breasts, to thus
condescend to suffocation.

He has swallowed a crystal of quartz; heart
illuminated with dialogue.

She is reclining on a scarlet bed, which
tastes of iron or blood. You contemplate
the imminent nuisances, delights.

You cannot understand the language she is
speaking and, while her red lips move, the
sound seems to emanate from her palm.

The stage is so distant the actors' voices
reach him only after bouncing off the black.

There are apparently miles between you and her, as if you were a raptor.

You can smell her breath.

Many different languages are involved in the feigned dispute. He knows none, yet from attitude concludes they are concerned with the absence of music.

They are dragging about a monkey's head; presumably a symbol.

You are drinking her cologne.

When she glances at your her irises are red.

Prop: a helmet with mirrors in the eye sockets.

With mascara she has drawn eyelashes on her forehead; the attendant irises are red.

There is a monkey's body on the bed.

When they turn out the lights he imagines he can smell the person who would be sitting next to him.

She is in the process of translation; assumes the position of a clairvoyant.

You are crying because their voices continue in issuance; hearing another conversation as the tears strike.

When she covers her eyes with her palms you read the future.

The monkey is leashed, balanced on an actor's head. The soliloquy issues from its mouth.

This is the audition, so you are blindfolded. Your palms are secured to your face with cords. Your nostrils are scorched. You are prepared.

The first note is ammonia; the second, licorice; the third, cedar.

It is dissonant.

The fifth is cinnamon; sixth, heather; seventh, vinegar:

cacophony.

Eighth: pigweed; ninth: ice; tenth: burnt hair; eleventh: coal; offal; pine; coffee; fifteenth: blood; sixteenth: cod; seventeenth: cherry blossom; tobacco; nineteenth: leather.

You are becoming nauseated; the future is iris.

: To contain emotion one must willfully denounce any attempt at appropriation of symbols of transgression.

: There are long fine filaments extending from the pupils which do not distort vision and which can only be perceived, by another, if the subject is positioned correctly in conceivable light.

: The paradox is to orchestrate the perfumes to prevent arbitrary mingling, mutation or

conversance, other than prescribed by score. There can be no improvisation.

: Once grown, the mask cannot be removed, but like a snake shedding its skin, faces peel off revealing an endless succession—continuing to grow from the core.

: Ideally, a female actor mouths the words while a hidden male enunciates them.

: To alter emotion, alter color, and if the subject is composed of glass its moods are endless. The ideal instance is a glass ball floating in water within a bowl fabricated from mirrors.

: The music must continually repudiate its own aspirations, its own desire.

: Predictably, the structure of the body must be destroyed, so that all movement is antithetical to natural predilection.

: Any other conception would fail to repudiate the conventions prescribed by chaos.

She is floating naked in snow. There is an aura melted around her. As if for sustenance, her mouth is open.

You can see yourself seated on the horizon. You are cutting the alphabet into your fingertips.

The accumulating snow is causing his face to become masklike; the left side sags as if from stroke.

He is speaking from the right side of his face; thus he is lying, in profile.

You have evolved the equation that his speech makes you snowblind. This allows you to extend your arms to touch her with your fingertips.

She believes that touch is contagion; your tendencies in perception remaining on her skin.

You are transcribing his dictation; the words drop as small globes of ice from the left corner of his mouth.

She is seeking to become transparent; glass or ice, so that her waist will break light.

She has designed this transformation by memorizing the angles of the flakes which fall into her mouth.

From where you sit, you perceive this as the inversion of speech, or as consumption, thus filling her with articulation.

He sees her fingers move rhythmically and believes she is hearing music, her fingers in sympathy, but she is counting.

She is barely floating above the damp ground, so her pale shadow is askance.

Thus the skin of her back and buttocks is not distorted by pressure.

You would like to insert your hand in that space, in sympathy with absence.

Because of temperature in absence, there is
no odor which he could rub between his fingers.

No set.

8 followed by 34 by 67 by 2 by 6 & 39, double duration by 110 less 4 by 99 held to end.

First voice:

What is the duration of resonance

What is the duration of yellow

What is the duration of decline

What is the duration of trajectory

What is the duration of rose

What is the duration of cloud

What is the duration of appetite

Second voice in simultaneity:

The taste of a voice

Absence captured in one's mouth

The anonymity of nakedness

The tongue as hand

Light as passivity

To structure on the basis of mutation

Killing as the cessation of a perfume

The composition is based on the notion of walking down a crowded street with one's eyes closed, and smelling the various perfumes of women who pass by. The intent is to discern her in this seeming cacophony.

And thereby possess her by the assimilation of her perfume into your body.

She is lying on a pane of glass.

He is opening small vials of perfume.

You are in the audience, anonymous.

The pane is suspended three feet above the stage.

He is pouring the perfumes, with delicacy and precision, upon her.

She is grasping a flame, as if self-immolation were a metaphor.

The ascending vapors form a visible fog above her.

This she waves goodbye to you.

But to your tongue the air is but appetite: the soprano's breath.

The entrances to the perfumes are oblique, are lacunas, are dismissal of time, are metronome.

There is the entrance of apology. Therein, even if singing, one's voice is retracted into one's mouth as if one were consuming a rodent in the manner of a snake.

From this entrance one cannot ascertain conversation since perspective is consumptive, not sympathetic.

The texture of one's voice is perscriptively coarse.

There is the entrance of appetite. This too is consumptive, but here there can be no apology or satiation. Neither is the entrance of desire. The absences are similar, glass to obsidian, perhaps twins who speak mutually unintelligible languages.

Surface here is that of the tongue, not palate.

Hue is invented as pink, or yellow.

There is the entrance of lace. One does not enter here, though it is a curtain. To enter would be to rend the fabric; one must merely look through, and thus enter by eyes and passion, so the body is exiled from this form of hearing.

Hue must be white, as absence, a design of nothing which overlays a texture of regulation over that which one desires.

The texture is that of hair; fragrance that of slightly overripe fruit.

There is the entrance of submission. The opening is very low, or very shallow, as if its fabricator desired removal of one's head in entering, not concerning stature but sensation and dialectics.

The perfumes must be symphonic, harmonic, absent of individuation, like a mob or flock which moves with synchronicity and endorsement of history.

The taste is sulfurous; the texture of pitch.

There is the entrance of predation. Its orifice is a metaphor, beak or jaw. Its voice is a tole: an odor of warm entrails; an equation of subtraction to compel accretion, as one rolls a ball of snow.

This must be falsetto and frenzy.

A game of blood-dots in snow; the loser, clothing.

To enter here one must carry the arms of malice and of dispersal, techniques of absorption.

There is the entrance of conceit; there is the entrance of cruelty; the entrance of promiscuity; of delight;

pathos;

obstacle;

the numinous;

excretion;

abandonment;

there is the entrance of absolution, vindication, and the entrance of volition.

She assumes herself as this perfume, as these perfumes, yet possesses no exit by which to enter.

JOHN YAU

ANNA BIALOBRODA: SELF-PORTRAITURE AS SELF-REPRESENTATION

Anna Bialobroda is currently working on three series of paintings, all of which are imaginative self-portraits. In one series, she depicts a featureless figure seemingly about to begin, in the middle of, or having just ended a solo performance on stage. Her sense of timing and rupture is crucial to the success of these paintings. In *Bluff,* 1987, for example, the whitish figure is surrounded by burning doors and windows, while her reflection suggests that the seemingly empty auditorium is underwater. On one level, the situation typifies the notion of woman as a heroine-victim. It is not only a familiar representation, but it is one that has been a central theme of numerous movies and other popular entertainment narratives. In order to act (to work), the woman-actress must act as if she is in a perilous situation waiting to be rescued. However, in Bialobroda's examination of this situation, this familiar story, the figure is standing at the edge of the stage, both aware of and unphased by her circumstances. There are no rescuers.

Given that the title of the painting is *Bluff,* the viewer asks: Does this painting depict a false sense of display or does it challenge my power to define and therefore limit? The empty auditorium functions as another mediated zone between the viewer and the painting. Self-conscious of what is being looked at, the viewer begins to look through his or her own act of looking. It is this zone the painting focuses on, the place where the defining, circumscribing look begins to be felt, and the Hidden Self and the Subjected Self begin looking at each other.

In the second series, Bialobroda examines the subject of self-portraiture from the viewer's position. In *Representation,* 1988, she depicts a severely cropped view of an androgynous face (young woman or man?) looking into a mirror. Classically, the pose is one taken by a woman. Moreover, the image of a woman

looking at herself in a mirror is an art historical image most often marked by men. Among the modernist paintings that come to mind, for example, one might be inclined to mention Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror,* 1932, for example, or Balthus' *Japanese Figure with a Black Mirror,* 1967-76. Bialobroda re-examines this image within in the context of movies, the fantasy world of movie houses and film, and the amount of information one needs to have before recognition begins. Are we looking at the image of a woman looking at herself? Or, the more likely possibility, are we being asked to re-examine the image of a woman looking at herself. After all, it is an image of the self that has been marked over by others.

In *Representation,* Bialobroda reappropriates the right to represent her self, her Subjected Self. By doing this within the realm of painting, she aligns herself with Frida Kahlo. Both use images to investigate the realm of self-portraiture, and the relationship between the Hidden Self and the Subjected Self. Both define a project whose validity has been questioned by critics and historians. Certainly, within Formalism's view of art history, self-portraiture lost its validity around the time abstraction triumphed over figuration, and the literal vanquished the metaphorical once and for all.

Formalism reduced painting's project to two modes, abstraction and figuration. This opposition is the result of elevating Cubism to the highest status within art history. It suggests that painting can be either abstract or realist. One of Formalism's problems is that it doesn't take the image-making artist into account. Kahlo and Bialobroda are neither realists nor abstractionists. Consequently, their accomplishment cannot be measured according to such materialist standards as style. Rather, they are image makers whose project is focused on the Subjected Self.

In the third series, Bialobroda isolates and examines the kinds of distances that occur between seeing and experiencing. In this group, she often employs the device of a grisaille rectangle (a scene from the film) within a rectangle (the auditorium with a legible "exit" sign) of bright accents and subdued colors. Juxtaposed against this rectangle is a grisaille view of the auditorium. In *Endangered,* 1988, Bialobroda depicts a closeup view of a fenced-in area, which has been identified by a sign as "Endangered." The

word is split, so that "End" is on the right side and "Angered" is on the left. Behind the fence is an open prison gate. Sitting in an auditorium and looking at the image of an open prison door behind a fenced-in area. The painting depicts a demarcated area (the prison gate opening into the side of a rocky mound) within a demarcated area (a fenced in area) within a demarcated area (the highlighted zone of the auditorium) within a demarcated area (the grisaille auditorium) within a demarcated area (the painting, which is an endangered species, mounted on a wall in a room or gallery).

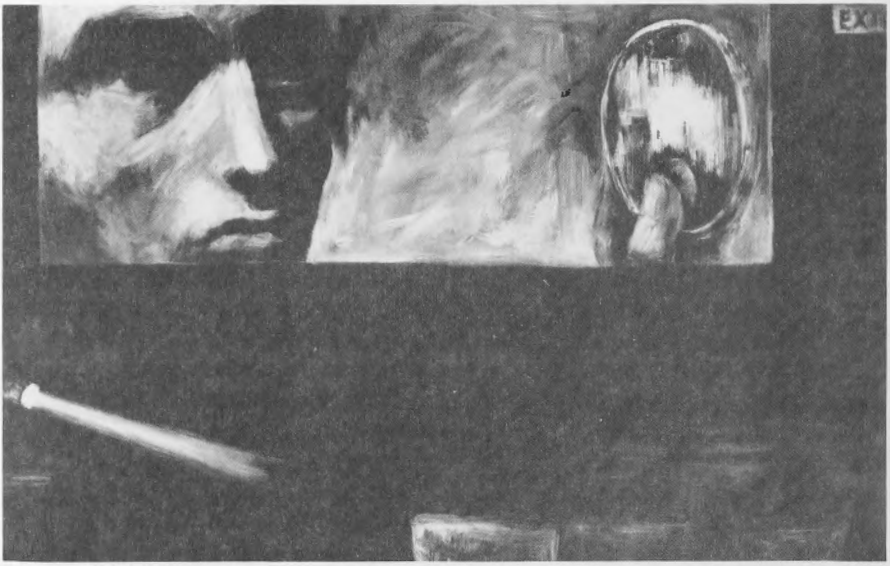
Historically, self-portraiture has been a masculine province; and culture's way of looking at women has largely been determined by measured against masculine values and attributes. Bialobroda's paintings investigate the confines of this subjected condition.

ANNA BIALOBRODA

FIVE PAINTINGS

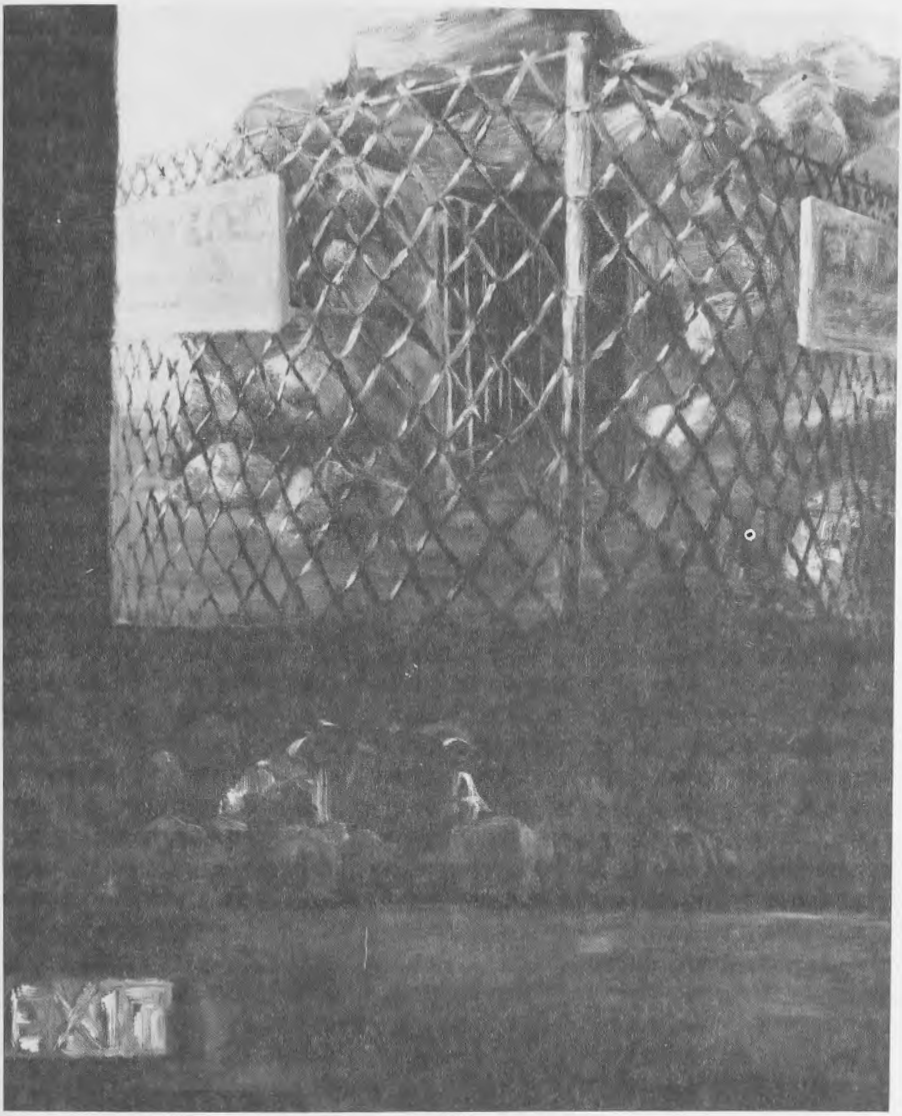
BLUFF

1987, 74" x 92", A/C
(photo credits:
Pelka/Noble Photography)



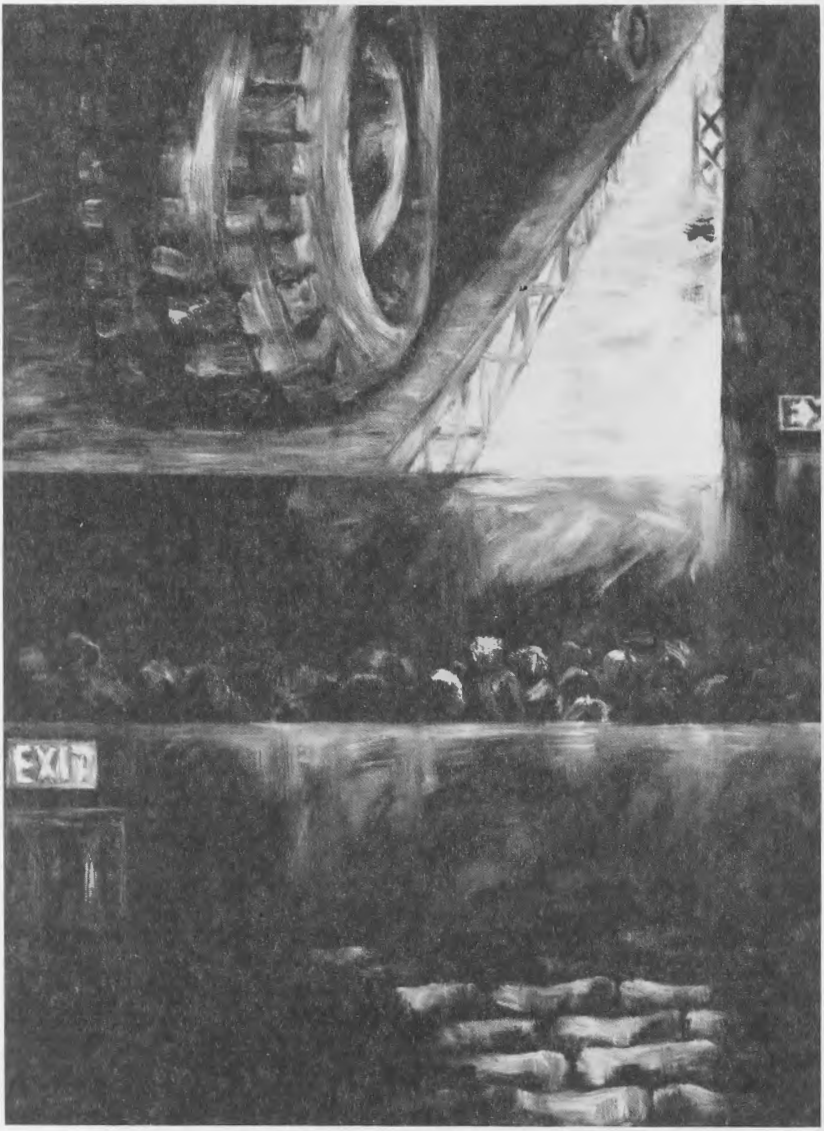
REPRESENTATION

1988, 74" x 114", A/C



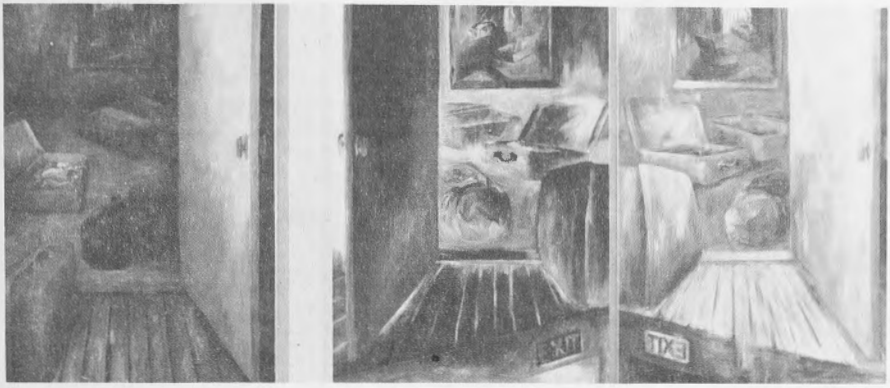
ENDANGERED

1988, 60" x 48", A/C



CROSSOVER

1988, 114" x 84", A/C



DIVISIONS

1988, 84" x 194", A/C

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The Cuban writer José Lezama Lima (1910–1976), first known in English for his novel *Paradiso,* translated in 1974, is now slowly being discovered beyond the frontiers of the Spanish language as the extraordinary poet he was. His poetry, dense and expansive, hermetic and exuberant, was always driven by restless reflections on poetics, which he broadly conceived as a syncretic inquiry into many areas of history and belief. Those reflections were at times set forth in discursive form and one of Lezama's most succinct yet most inclusive statements of that kind was this interview, possibly his first, done in 1964 by the Cuban critic and poet Armando Alvarez Bravo (born 1938) and later published as part of Alvarez Bravo's introduction to an anthology of Lezama's poetry and prose entitled *Orbita de Lezama Lima* (Havana: UNEAC, 1966). Those years up to about 1970 were still a relatively liberal time in Cuban literary politics, during which Lezama was able to bring out in Cuba a number of major works, including his-three volume anthology of Cuban poetry in 1965 and, later in 1966, after *Orbita,* the long-awaited Spanish text of *Paradiso,* which was to bring him a greater measure of international recognition than he had ever known before. (After the Padilla affair of 1971, which inaugurated a more repressive period, Lezama spent the last five years of his life in ostracism, and his last important works, the novel *Oppiano Licario* and the poems of *Fragmentos a su imán,* were smuggled abroad for their first publication in Spanish.) Amid the enthusiasm generated by *Paradiso,* Lezama was interviewed a number of times, but mostly by non-Cubans who knew little of his work and were unable to focus their questions as effectively as they are focussed here. The "prose fragments" mentioned on page 175, in which Lezama's "poetic system. . .began to take shape," were translated by me as "Ten Prose Poems" in *Sulfur,* no. 3 (1982).

—JAMES IRBY

INTERVIEW WITH JOSE LEZAMA LIMA (1964)
by Armando Alvarez Bravo

AAB: You are known and renowned as an enigmatic poet. For many you are the figure of obscurity *par excellence* in Cuban poetry. There is no doubt that your endeavor inaugurates a novel way of seeing things which delivers nothing easily to the reader and instead demands of him an alert attitude. After these twenty-five years, how do you consider what has been said and is still said about these characteristics of your poetry?

JLL: I do not think that the contemplation of my poetry offers at present greater difficulty than that offered by the contemplation of any other poetic prism. It is true that our romantic and later our *fin de siècle* poetry had no elements that could be considered enigmatic. But this fact cannot serve to join together, as is customary, the concepts of the enigmatic and the obscure. These two concepts are not necessarily tangent. Once I was told that Góngora was a poet who made clear things obscure and that I, on the contrary, was a poet who made obscure things clear, obvious, radiant. I have stressed the fact that it was among medieval minstrels that the *trobar clus* appeared, these being the minstrels who produced obscure poetry. Thus we see that even minstrelsy, which by definition was simple, had nothing to do with clarity, since already among the minstrels there were some who produced obscure or hermetic poetry. And in Nordic countries there were kings who were skalds that in their own palaces cultivated obscure poetry, just as there were kings who performed as buffoons in their own courts. The verses of the skalds were always nebulous and difficult to understand. For example:

> I place the round serpent
> on the tongue of the falcon's perch
> beside the bridge of Odin's shield.

What this means is that a ring is placed on the small finger of the hand. One needs to know that falcon's perch means the falconer's hand. The tongue is the small finger. And the bridge of Odin's shield is the arm from which the warrior's shield hangs. It is told that a skald, a hermetic Nordic troubadour, invited a king to have some beer soup. The monarch accepted and the poet took him to the edge of the ocean, where he said: there's your soup; when you finish, you'll have your beer. I cite these examples taken from skalds so you can see that obscure poetry has nothing to do with the baroque, with the dazzling baroque of Marino, of Chiabrera, of Góngora. There is obscure poetry and there is clear poetry.

This is a fact that we have to accept simply, just as we accept the existence of the day and of the night, of the things that are done by day and the things that are done by night. But you will understand, my friend, that, in short, neither obscure things are so obscure as to terrify us, nor are clear things so clear as to let us sleep in peace. But all this business about obscurity and clarity now seems to me outmoded, overworked. What matters is what Pascal called *pensées de derrière*. That is, the eternally enigmatic other side of things, both of the obscure or distant and of the clear and immediate. The tendency toward obscurity, toward resolving enigmas, toward playing games within games, is as common to mankind as is our image reflected in the clear surface of the water, which can lead us with egotistical voluptuousness to the final blow, to our death. There is no need to seek obscurities where they do not exist.

AAB: Image in your poetry is a motif, a theme, a concern. It arises as a defense against realities that become realities by their own momentum, but, at the same time, it arises as a force. How do you establish the relationships between image and metaphor?

JLL: In the terms of my poetic system of the world, metaphor and image have as much in the way of carnality or living flesh within the poem as they have in the way of philosophical efficacy, external world or essential reason. One of the mysteries of poetry is the relationship between the analogue or connective force of metaphor, which advances and by so doing creates what we might call the substantive ground of poetry, and this advance through infinite analogies to a final point where the image is located, which image has a powerful regressive force, capable of covering all that substantiveness. The relation between metaphor and image can be likened to a horse that can both fly and swim and persists within a resistant substance, which is what we may consider the image to be. The image is the reality of the invisible world. Thus the Greeks placed images as populators of the world of the dead. I believe that the marvel of a poem is that it manages to create a body, a resistant substance set between a metaphor that advances by creating infinite connections and a final image that assures the survival of that substance, that *poiesis*. In the same way that man has created orchestras, battles, soldiers sleeping in the shadow of palisades, great armadas, and homes in the bellies of whales, he has also created artificial bodies that are both caressable and resistant, like nature itself eluding and yielding to our touch. Once, when I was speaking of Martí and trying to establish the mysterious laws of poetry (and don't forget that the first laws were written in poetic form), I made reference to the fact that for those prodigious laws of the imagination twenty years of absence are equivalent to a sudden vortex in death,

just as, in an orchestra, a trumpet may be equivalent to twenty violins. The connections of metaphor are progressive and infinite. The firecovering that the image forms over the substantiveness of poetry is as unitary and fixed as a star. That's why I state in one of my poems this deep paradox of poetry: that love is not made caressingly from pore to pore, but from pore to star, where space forms a suspension and the body plunges down and swims at length.

AAB: When you reached your mature years you set forth a very personal conception of poetry, a poetic system. The formulation of this system began to take shape in a series of prose fragments included in your book of poems *La fijeza* [1949]. What we might classify as theory had its beginnings as poetry. Those first insights later took on a discursive form in essays and the bases of the system were nurtured from different sources. In spite of this later evolution, is it still correct to think that the driving force of the system is fundamentally poetic?

JLL: That's correct. The driving force is essentially poetic. Some innocent people, terrified by the word "system," have thought my system is a philosophical study *ad usum* of poetry. Nothing could be further from my intention. I have always proceeded on the basis of elements proper to poetry, i.e. poem, poet, metaphor, image. When I began to come of age intellectually—and like all poets I have been a man of varied and voluptuous readings, following the tradition of La Fontaine, who postulated the poet as the *amateur de toutes les choses, le polyphile—*, I came to understand that, by virtue of that hazardous and reversible play of metaphor and image, what seemed to be a dispersion in my readings was really an all-devouring urge towards integration into a unity, into a mirror, into a water both flowing and fixed. One day I was thinking about great periods of history that have had neither great nor powerful poets and yet were great periods for the world of poetry. It was a very important fact for me that, from Lucretius and Virgil down to the appearance of Dante, there had been no great poets in that immense expanse of time, no access to the poet as an expressive unity. And these were the times of Charlemagne, of the *Enchiridion* or Magic Book, the cathedrals, the Holy Grail, the knights of King Arthur, the Crusades, the Golden Legend, Saint Francis, Saint Catherine. . .This led me to study what I call the imaginary eras or eras dominated by an image, which I have expounded in several essays I believe are the most significant part of my work.

AAB: I would like you to tell me more about those imaginary eras. And, within them, about how conceptions that are pagan from your own Catholic point of view can be integrated into Christian conceptions, pro-

ducing thereby a denial of Heidegger's postulate of man as a creature destined for death and offering instead, as you do in your system, a postulate of man as a creature destined for resurrection by way of poetry.

JLL: For me it is both fascinating and difficult to speak about all that you suggest. The subject offers infinite possibilities. I see it all as a whole and it is impossible for me to express it in a moment, or perhaps even in an eternity, as such. Whenever I approach it I come up against this difficulty, but let us talk. There is an Idumaean period, or period of phallic fabulation, when the human being is still joined to the vegetal and when time, because of hibernation, does not have the meaning it later takes on for us. In each of man's metamorphoses, his dormancy creates a fabulous time. Thus, there appears the mysterious tribe of Idumaea, in Genesis, where reproduction is not based on carnal dialogue by couples, on germinal dualism. The human being falls asleep on the cool river banks, beneath the broad foliage of the trees, and with graceful slowness a tree sprouts from his shoulder. The man goes on sleeping and the tree goes on growing, thickening its bark and roots and moving closer to the secret mobility of the river. This new creature of the germinating tree detaches itself in the propitious season of summer and smilingly begins to sing its rowing songs in the dawn of the rivers. This is how man lived, close to primitive nebulas and the trees, which, as they grew, gained perspectives with no need to be submissive in movement. This is the great period when the evidence of beauty is immediate. But there are others. We can refer to the presence of the image in the siege if Ilium, whose reality is preserved by poetry in the face of its dark destruction. Or the relationship between the mysteries of the priest kings and Fou Hi (2697 B.C.) preserved in texts like the *Tao Te Ching,* a title whose closest translation might be "The Book of the Creative Uncreatedness," where the Taoists meditate on the luminous egg, on the mirror, on primitive androgyny. I should like to make a reference at this point to the way a culture may give greater depth to concepts taken from another very distant culture. For example, for the Greeks and the Romans the poet was the *puer senex* or aged child, but for the Taoists the name of Lao Tzu meant old-wise-child. We see how in the fifth century B.C., in the period of classic China's great religious upsurge, there appears a more profound concept of the Greco-Roman esteem for the poet.

AAB: Almost an intuition.

JLL: Quite so. When I was delving deeper into the imaginary eras, studying the great moment of the Etruscans, with their priest king Numa Pompilius, the creator of bronze, of the vestals' cult of fire, and of the

king's copulation with the nymph Tacita, I encountered the word *potens,* which, according to Plutarch, represented in priestly Tuscan the "if possible," the infinite possibility we later observe in the *virgo potens* of Catholicism—or, how to engender a god by supernatural means—and I came to the conclusion that it was that infinite possibility that the image must embody. And since the greatest of infinite possibilities is resurrection, poetry—the image—had to express its most encompassing dimension, which is, precisely, resurrection. It was then that I gained the perspective which I set against the Heideggerian theory of man-for-death, proposing a concept of poetry that establishes the prodigious causality of being-for-resurrection, of being that triumphs over death and over the Saturnian realm. So, if you asked me to give a definition of poetry, which would be for me an almost desperate predicament, I would have to do it in these terms: it is the image attained by the man of resurrection. Then I discovered or moved on to another concept: kings as metaphors, and by this I refer to monarchs like Saint Louis, who signed himself *Roi de Tous les Français,* Edward the Confessor, Saint Ferdinand, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Alfonso X the Learned, in whom the person came to be constituted in a metaphor that progressed toward a concept of the people as emanating a grace and penetrating into the valley of splendor, into the path of glory, in anticipation of the Day of Resurrection, when everything, even the scars of the saints, will glow with the glow of a stellar metal. This phenomenon appears not only in history, but also in particular choral situations. It can be seen in men, in the warriors who sleep in the shadow of the walls they are about to assault. Like those who formed what was called in Napoleon's time the *Grande Armée,* who marched across all Europe. A body of men who in victory or defeat attained to a unity in which the metaphor of their connections took on the totality of an image. In other words, man, a nation, different situations that form certain groupings, may rise to a poetic plenitude. This conception of poetry may even group the animal kingdom into an arrangement of direct poetry with regard to man. A bit more recklessness here, and we can take a step further. We are on a farm and suddenly we see what the Oriental masters call the elemental invisible, which turns into a white butterfly. We see how a dark corner is reanimated into a moving shape. It is the spider coming closer to become intoxicated with the music surrounding man. And just as a tree does not walk because it has a aerial perspective, the spider in its web has a wider ambience than man does. A stay at the beach sadly comes to an end. The crab has shared a space with man and at the end of the season we see it leaving its marks along the highway man takes back to his boredom. We see the frog, in its ancestral position at the mouth of a well, maintaining its statuesque mien as a prince transformed. It shrieks with a trembling of its legs, as if it were about to give

birth once more to the prince hidden within its body. Also there are simple human positions that attract a mysterious dialogue in a propitious image, as in some silent sacrifice. A ship plows the waves. A traveller comes to the railing and his cigarette burns with a slowness that becomes as magnetic as a desert wind. If we close our eyes and then open them, the traveller is no longer alone. By his side, in the night, a shape has been reanimated, similar to that vertebral consciousness that holds together the flight of birds in their autumn migrations. All this is very strange, but. . . As you can see, there is much to see and try to decipher.

AAB: In the system you have generally outlined, you borrow certain expressions from various authors and historical periods and give them meanings somewhat different from the ones they had in their original contexts. Was that change or expansion necessary in order to integrate them into your system?

JLL: It was. Knowledge, repeated encounter with those expressions and meditation helped me enter into the ways of their possibilities. My poetic system unfolds, as is logical to suppose, within the history of culture and of the image, and not within some kind of wild frenzy. Thus, I inscribe at its threshold a series of maxims having very deep resonances. The first is from Saint Paul and says: *caritas omnia credit*. "Charity believes everything." Next to it I place another from Giambattista Vico: the impossible credible. In other words, man, by virtue of being a believer, of dwelling in the world of charity, of believing everything, comes to dwell in a supernatural world filled with gravitational forces. At this point I move on to that vast world extending from Saint Anselm to Nicholas of Cusa, who said in his book *De Docta Ignorantia*: "The greatest things are understood incomprehensibly," meaning that the steps rising up to God, to the Greatest, are understood without comprehension. This can be clarified, on the one hand, by thinking that one can comprehend without understanding. But there is a moment when this comprehension and this understanding come together, and that moment is provided by an acceptance of the *greatest* concept. To close this series, I will allude to a statement by Pascal which clarifies his argument that, since true nature has been lost, everything now can be nature. The statement is: "It is not good for man not to see anything; neither is it good for him to see so much that he thinks he possesses something; it is good, rather, that he see only enough to be aware how much he has lost. It is good to see and not to see: this is precisely the state of nature." I have given you four expressions scattered about in these writers' work without implying that they have there the explicit intention I give them in my system. Expressions that in my poetic world are points of reference forming a contrapuntal projection to reach

their unity in this new conception of world and image, of enigma and mirror.

AAB: In developing your poetic system, you have indicated, at different times, that with it you aim to arrive at a purely poetic methodology. Would you tell me something about that methodology?

JLL: I try in my system to destroy Aristotelian causality by seeking a poetic state of unconditionality. But the marvellous thing, which we outlined earlier in relation to metaphor and image, is that this poetic unconditionality has a powerful gravitation, has its bases and its adamantine points of reference. Hence it is possible to speak of poetic ways or a poetic methodology within that unconditional realm formed by poetry. First, we will cite the Stoics' concept of *occupatio,* that is, of the total occupation of a body. In referring to the image, we have already seen how it covers the substantive ground or resistance of the poem. Next we will cite a concept that seems to us of enormous importance, which we have called "the oblique experience" *[la vivencia oblicua].* This is as if a man, without realizing it of course, were to create a waterfall in Ontario just by turning the light switch in his room. We can offer a very obvious example. When Saint George plunges his lance into the dragon, his horse falls down dead. Observe the following: the mere causal relation would be knight-lance-dragon. The regressive force we could explain by the other causality: dragon-lance-knight; but notice that it is not the knight who falls dead but his horse, according to which the relation is not causal but unconditional. This is the kind of relation we have called "oblique experience." There is also what I have called "the sudden flash" *[el súbito],* which we can consider as opposite to the Stoic *occupatio.* For example, if a student of German encounters the word *Vogel* (bird), then comes upon the word *Vogelbauer* (birdcage), and then encounters the word *vögeln,* suddenly *[de súbito],* as the causality bird-birdcage snaps into light like a match, he encounters the unconditional *vögeln,* which gives him the meaning of the bird penetrating into the cage, i.e. copulation. There is also what we might call "the hypertelic way or method" *[el camino o método hipertélico],* in other words, that which always goes beyond its finality by overcoming all determinisms. Another example. For a long time it was believed that a certain kind of ciliary worm would pull back only as far as the tide reached. But it has been observed that even when there is no tide they pull back the same distance. There are animals like the white-headed dipteran that while copulating kill the female. That hypertelic way that always goes beyond its immediate finality, as in this case, is essentially poetic. I see I need again to quote some words, this time from Tertulian, who says: "The son of God was crucified, that is not

shameful because it is shameful, and the son of God died, that is all the more credible because it is incredible, and after his burial he returned to life, that is true because it is impossible." From these words we can derive two poetic ways or methods: what is credible because it is incredible (the death of the son of God) and what is true because it is impossible (resurrection). I think I have answered your question.

AAB: You have spoken repeatedly of a return to origins (with regard to poetry, of course), and, in that return, of an elimination of dualism. What can you tell us about that view?

JLL: Already in my introduction to the first issue of *Orígenes* [in 1944] I tried to stress that. I wanted the poetry appearing in that magazine to be the poetry of a return to magic spells, to rituals, to the living ceremony of primitive man. It's very curious that a poet like Mallarmé, who enjoyed the benefits of a great tradition, should have come in his mature years to long for the magical art of a tribal chieftain, as if that essence of poetry he sought for contained both primitivism and the most extreme refinement. Similarly, we can stress that in his "Prose pour des Esseintes" he speaks of the *hyperbole de ma mémoire,* a position very close to that of Descartes when, as part of the methodical doubt of his intellectualist philosophy, he mentions what he calls hyperbolic doubt, repeating the famous argument that excessive doubt, the radical *dubito,* culminates in total, hyperbolic affirmation. Thus, what was involved for us was a problem concerning the incarnation of poetry, or, to put it in a language recalling that of theology, the hypostasis of poetry. What was involved was finding a foothold for poetry, an incarnation of metaphor and of image in historical temporality. Thus, metaphor was as much a matter of metamorphosis as it was of *metanoia,* or—what amounts to the same thing—of successive transmutations of body and soul, offering all the suggestiveness and fascination of metaphor as a *metanoia* that goes beyond simple metamorphosis to produce a transmutation of the *animus.* Since I've now spoken of metaphor, I'll make another reference to image. I should like what I mean in this dimension to be clearly seen. If we proceed on the basis of Pascal's claim that since true nature has been lost, all can be nature, we can situate the image in a precise area of striking fascination. In the first place, image is a substituted nature. In the second place, image covers the frightful destiny of the house of Atreus, for only it can clarify for us that frightful destiny. It clarifies for us the poetic concept of the entire ancient world.

AAB: And what about the modern world?

JLL: I think that in the case of Baudelaire, there is a return to *arete* or poetry as destiny, as sacrifice, and to *aristeia* or Pallas' protection of Diomedes as it appears in book VI of the *Iliad.* You can see, therefore, why that image has to appear obscure. It *is* obscure, torn from the very darkness of night. But that darkness or obscurity seems to repeat Oedipus' memorable words: "Ah, darkness, my light." Of course, both that *arete* and that *aristeia* must entail an asceticism resulting from the prodigious accumulations bestowed by the joy of a lineage of the best. So the poet, by means of the image, makes himself master of nature and offers the most seductive of asceticisms, the only kind that can be tolerated, just as the basket makers of New Guinea were born with their umbilical cords wrapped around their necks or the kings of Georgia were born with the marks of their royal nature inscribed upon their left nipples.

AAB: Do you have any thesis regarding words used in a poetic sense?

JLL: Already in ancient times, Pythagoras cast a great deal of light upon the different varieties of the word. There are simple words, hieroglyphic words and symbolic words. That is, words that express, words that conceal and words that signify. When today, guided by the latest discoveries of German philology, we speak of the meaning of poetry, we realize that already Pythagoras had told us about words that signify, about symbolic words.

AAB: Of those varieties postulated by the philosopher, which have you preferred?

JLL: The poet makes use of all of Pythagoras' words or varieties, but he also goes beyond them. He manages to express a kind of *supra verba* which is actually the word in all its three dimensions of expressivity, concealment and sign. I would say there is a fourth kind of word which is the only one for poetry. A word to which I will not give a name, but which, based on the progressions of image and metaphor and on the resistance of the image, strengthens the body of poetry. I want you to keep in mind that all these things we've been talking about take place in the realm of what the harmonious Greeks called *terateia,* marvel, portent. You will recall that the whole atmosphere of *Prometheus*—of Aeschylus' *Prometheus*—takes place in the *terateia.* Aristotle clarifies this concept when he says that Aeschylus set about to achieve more of a marvelous surprise than an illusion of reality.

AAB: In that statement Aristotle posits two esthetic positions. Which do you believe is decisive?

JLL: I believe that contemporary man has attained to a position that surpasses that of the world of the Greeks. Scientific research concerning the structure of reality testifies to its symmetry and beauty. If we contemplate the staggered layers of sand left by a simoom, forming a kind of enormous colosseum, what we see combines marvel and surprise with a realistic illusion deriving from the laws of optics and our modern concept of perspective. But I'm going to pick up again the thread of what I was saying before, which I think will offer some clarification concerning your question. The Catholic lives in the supernatural realm and lends greater depth to the Greek concept of *terateia,* for he is imbued with the Pauline effort to give substance to faith, to find a substance for what cannot be seen, what cannot be heard, what cannot be touched, attaining, in poetry, to a world of full, valid signification.

AAB: And what about the non-Catholic, the atheist? What signification will he find? Where will it come from?

JLL: Well, can you imagine the case of a man who writes poetry and doesn't believe in anything at all?

AAB: I think all men believe in something. Since we are talking about poetry, what I would specifically like to know is how your poetic system accounts for the poetry written by a man who does not proceed on the basis of any religious conception. A man who is not a Catholic.

JLL: Look, Robespierre himself spoke of the Goddess Reason, just as Lucretius, the atomistic genius of atheism, talked about whirlwinds and furies and other forces of nature and considered them as gods. Aside from the fact that a man cannot deny the great contributions of the Orient, of the Greco-Roman world, of the sum of all that *anteriority* which Catholicism assimilated with exemplary reason and intuition, in accordance with the Pauline maxim which reveals the meaning of being *indebted:* "to Greeks and Romans, ancients and moderns, to all I am indebted." Though an atheistic poet may deny all these contributions, he cannot fail to turn within their ambience. I'll remind you of a contemporary example. We all know that Valéry always professed his atheism. But when he gave his definition of poetry, he called it "the paradise of language." You see how this atheist uses the word "paradise" with all the resonance of a Catholic. Besides, we have his studies of Leonardo, where he praises the position derived from the Council of Trent about the soul and the body being intertwined, forming a unity, and about there being a mystery of the body and a mystery of the soul that in man are ready for

his transfiguration. With this concept of transfiguration, the Catholic world surpassed the Greek concept of metamorphosis, in which the memory of the previous stage is obliterated by sleep.

AAB: This is Valéry's conception. But for many people, and I'm sorry to keep insisting, there is no soul, and yet that attitude does not prevent them from writing poetry. How do you reconcile these facts?

JLL: My friend, I've always believed my poetic system is something beautiful in itself, but I've never been so arrogant as to believe it is something unique. Above it I place poetry, poetry as the most transparent of mysteries or, if you wish, as mysterious transparency. That ambiguity allows me to say to you that it is not I but rather time that must answer that question: time that makes poetry and poetry that makes in time. We both serve poetry and all those who do the same will agree with me when I say that in the end poetry will unify everything; it is already beginning to do so. I don't think there's anything else to say.

AAB: Or everything's left to be said.

JLL: Or both.

(Translated from the Spanish by James Irby.)

NANCY SPERO: WORKS SINCE 1950
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
(2 July–28 August 1988)

Also: Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York (December 1987–January 1988); Mandel Art Gallery, Saskatoon (March–April 1988); List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (October–November 1988); Power Plant, Toronto (January–March 1989); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (Summer 1989)

This retrospective exhibition of Nancy Spero's works marks the first comprehensive survey of her nearly thirty years of artistic activity. It is

difficult, when confronted with the immediate power and terror and beauty of her work, to *believe* that it has taken so many years for her to receive the recognition such an exhibition represents. Yet it is not hard to understand why this might be so. Spero's art is neither fashionable, nor even "unfashionable," which in the dialectic of the art market often means "the next big thing." The MCA created an unintended irony, by exhibiting Jeff Koons, a recent New York rage, at the same time as Spero. Alongside the engaged statements of Spero's paintings and installations, Koons's glass-encased vacuum cleaners and blow-up toys appeared for what they are: a paroxysm of bad faith. If current reaction against abstraction and minimalism has, perhaps, begun to create a more sympathetic context for Spero's figural art, that's for the good. But is does not alter a basic fact: the integrity of Spero's work, in its self-fashioning of themes and techniques, makes it oblivious to novelties seized upon by lesser and less scrupulous artists.

The earliest work exhibited, the "sculptural" construction entitled *Mummified* (1950-51), seems already to inaugurate an intellectual and imagistic complex that recurs again and again. A casual glance reveals a grubby, grey stump, with features like a totemic face; it was only with a horrifying second look that I realized it was also a severed (woman's) knee-joint, wrapped in nylon. This early in Spero's career, then, what will emerge as a full-blown critique of the representation of women—their appropriation as the source of fetished part-objects and as the object of dismembering violence—makes its first tacit and tenuous appearance. The mummified form reappears in the paintings of the 1950s, in *Frieze* (1957–58), where the figure is repeated three times across the canvas, and in *At Their Word* (1957–58). This latter work commences Spero's use of verbal texts in juxtaposition with imagery. The hand-written inscription confirms the link of this fetish-image with a violence against women: "At their word, the word which tortures the spirit, / The sick woman was turned into a corpse, / The corpse was hung from a stake." Spero will recirculate and reinterpret motifs from this period in much later works: the "at their word" text appears for example, fifteen years later, in the *Torture of Women* installation (see *Sulfur* 19 for illustrations).

The most painterly works are those of the so-called "Black Paris Paintings," which include the emotionally ambiguous *Lovers*. A man and a woman lie naked together, yet their distant expressions and the dark somber tones of their surroundings imply an irony: the immanence of solitude in their momentary drawing-near. Contemporaneously, however, in *Merde* and *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You,* Spero articulates a visual vocabulary for some of her most direct and unwithholding work: the angel-tongue-turds that explode from the Vietnam war series of the mid-1960s. Beginning with *Male Bomb* and *Female Bomb and Victims,* both

from 1966, the libidinal body and the technological body merge, releasing a deadly force. As desire creeps over the simplified machinic forms of these works—suckled tits dangling from bombs, a helicopter shitting death ("I Laid My Stuff All Over It"), heads swelling like mushroom-clouds, the F1-11 as a huge eagle, swastikaed crematorium stacks releasing angel-tongue heads—the paranoic perversity of the war in Vietnam is relentlessly stripped of its veil of media rhetoric. These works are crude and "tasteless," undigestible. There is no indulgence in the elegiac pastoralism that often marks Western art's bad conscience about the Third World. Spero presents *our* war, raw, rotten, and burnt. Each painting curses out (as she would quote from Artaud): "now choke on your law."

In 1969, Spero began to incorporate Artaud's texts into her works directly. The figure of the barred mouth, overwritten by red letters exemplifies for me the Artaud paintings and cutouts: the inability to speak, without even the purity of silence; external signs robbing one's own being. The *Formules de Transformation* (1969) presents a gilded cutout of human form, diving along the circumference of a graphed circle, with rays and angles subdividing it, and each ray labelled by a letter. Below the figure is quoted, from Artaud: "In that kind of eternal state which / really is never detached from / limbo / and can never enter reality." Here the circle abstracts the image of an open mouth. The rays from the circle's center are the vectors of the breath's force. But from its very origin breath is measured, divided, rationalized, overcoded by phonemes (y, j, n, a, b, x, m); each signifying sound suspends Artaud/Spero in non-being, the limbo of another's thought, barring unmediated ("cruel") contact with reality.

The *Codex Artaud* (1971–72) begins the work of recuperating this void, by, as Artaud did, meticulously documenting its topology. Each section of the codex is constructed from panels of irregular-edged paper, sealed together and fastened by white pins; typed quotations and cutout figures sparsely punctuate this negative space. Perhaps more important than the figures, however, is the paper itself; its folds and gathers where a text may accumulate, its evident reliefs and smoothnesses, its tears and puckers and tensions. The *Artaud Codex* unscrolls the tight tube of the self, exploring its seams and blanks, the objects and persons and words that fill or efface it.

Spero has uncovered in her many years of struggle in art and political life a selfhood and temporality all her own. Or rather not exclusively her own, but one shared by women across history, as her biggest installation *Notes in Time on Women* (1976–79) would suggest. This work consists of twenty-four panels, on which are printed figures borrowed from many of her prior works and scores of quoted passages: "authoritative" statements of men about women, narratives by women, accounts of accomplish-

ments or sufferings of women, women figures in mythology, and many other textualizations of "women" in the history of discourses. Whereas "Notes" emphasizes the affirmative power of the feminine, another power, the force of resistance in the midst of profound suffering, is presented by the *Torture of Women* installation. *Torture of Women* draws heavily from Amnesty International accounts of torture in Turkey, Chile, and elsewhere; it juxtaposes these texts with medieval legal justifications of torture, mythological figures and texts, and political graffiti.

It would be entirely appropriate to speak here of an "archeology" of femininity: a recapitulation of the discourse of the feminine; a recapturing of "women's time" from the eternal return of male-dominated "history"; a recaptioning of the imagery of women from the archaic goddess to the medieval witch to the Vietnamese peasant fleeing from the bombs; and finally, a recapitation of a feminine subjectivity dismembered by torture and male violence. Spero speaks in the accompanying video interview of her immediate sense of identification with Artaud, who wrote of the loss of *la langue:* at once language, and the tongue that would speak it. If the installations of the 1970s *Notes in Time* and *Torture of Women,* represent an advance over her Vietnam war series and the *Artaud Codex,* it is in finding a place from which to affirm in a "voice of her own."

I am tempted to use the word "rhythm" to characterize this affirmative moment: a word not foreign to speech, but linked more particularly to the ecstatic arts of poetry, music, and dance. Several of Spero's later works (from the 1980s) utilize repeated printings of the same figures across horizontal scrolls or in vertical diptychs and triptychs. These works depart from the visual and verbal complexities of both the *Artaud Codex* and the large installations. Their interest lies, instead, in the differential spacing of repeated figures, rhythmic articulations of the libidinal body. In the video interview, we see Spero seated in the midst of her cast of characters, the print masters spread across the floor of her studio. Sheela-na-gig, the sky goddess, the dildo dancer, the mourning woman, the fleeing woman: in the works of the '80s Spero draws from a transhistorical *typology* of woman figures, who communicate through their rhythmic interaction with one another. One of the most thematically rich of these visually simplified works is *Black and Red* (1983). It consists of only two figures, printed one over another in the contrasting colors of the title. One figure shows a lithe, naked woman, dancing; the other oviform abstraction of the Venus of Willendorf, a thirty-thousand year old cult object of Upper Paleolithic Europe. Spero presents the movement of the living body in time across the timeless, ageless body of the goddess. She indulges no nostalgia for an unspoiled, mythical past, but rather enacts an historically-conscious irruption of one temporal register into and through another.

These works have a performative, real time aspect unusual to most visual artworks, particularly when viewed in a museum context. As a male viewer, I felt not so much judged or accused by them, as displaced: Spero's works resist the consumeristic voyeurism of the aesthetic gaze, and demand instead thought, reading, and movement. In this sense, even the darkest works have a utopian significance, as condensed forms of female political community. A woman friend who saw the exhibition recounted to me: "I was reading one of those long panels of *Notes in Time on Women,* when suddenly I realized I was standing together with several other women, in their teens, in their sixties, and between, each working-through a different portion of the whole."

—TYRUS MILLER

STEALING ANNA'S SKIN
I—57 by Paul Metcalf
Longriver Books, 1988

Metcalf's *I—57* (Longriver Books, 1988) is itself a book of movement: movement outward, from the chaos of madness; from the brain, through metaphor, to the earth. It moves through the contours of landscape, through time, and returns to the body: to the skin, eyes—organs of sense and perception through which the world, its places and people, can be felt. Like *Patagoni* and *U.S. Dept. of the Interior, I—57* is constructed around a land/body metaphor that culminates in a literal journey. Here, however, Metcalf travels not to the landmass's edges, Peru and Alaska, but toward a center, a source, along a bland stretch of interstate running from Cairo, Illinois to Chicago.

I—57 is not so much a narrative of place as one of the reaching and inevitable passing of places. The book's opening section, a jarring montage of schizophrenic testimonials, evokes a consciousness turned in on itself, trapped:

I am fighting my way through deep varnish (13)

and:

I have never stopped writing this, and it has not yet begun (24)

From here, the narrative moves outward to clinical descriptions of th brain, its tissue. Leni Fuhrman's accompanying photo-images of the sku and its haunted interior grow more abstract and less threatening as th text steadies itself through the language of science, looking *at,* rather tha *through,* the schizophrenic brain. Overlaid with unifying textures in sec tion two and, in three, with plant stems and leaves, Fuhrman's image help blend the outside with the inside, the body with environment, s that emerging capillaries course into rivers. Metcalf's text juxtapose neurological with geological sources, narrating the history of the land, th sometimes violent story of the Mississippi valley's formation, developin the connection between earth and brain along textural, kinetic and lin guistic lines.

The fulcrum of *I—57* is its fourth and penultimate section, whic lyrically fuses the skin, its layered composition, with the gentle formatio of the earth's textured surface. Metcalf treats the skin as a perceptual organ and includes provocative accounts of "dermaloptics," the phenomenon of seeing (or sensing) color and shape through the skin of the face, hands and torso. Section four confuses the senses with rhapsodically synesthetic passages like the one describing a blind man's dream, but this mad scrambling of sensual data is salvaged by a central affirmation. The skin, for Metcalf, is the final agent between interior and exterior, between consciousness and world:

rather than remember directions
it is better to feel the sun on the cheekbone,

and move by the compass
over the skin of the earth (69)

I—*57's* closing section finds its author, age 57, moving northward, through southern Illinois, on Interstate 57. Here, Metcalf's own photographs depict the middle Mississippi Valley landscape strewn with contemporary artifacts: buildings, billboards, monuments. His journal contrasts the interstate culture with the culture of rural Illinois, focusing on moments of brief exchange between himself, an outsider, and the locals.

At the heart of this journey is Paul Metcalf's encounter with Mrs. Anna G. Powell, 102-year-old resident of Creal Springs, Illinois. Entering her home and the circle of her family to interview and photograph the woman, Metcalf almost restages James Agee's foray into the rural south in

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. But Metcalf's meeting with Anna Powell is direct and untormented. He enters her world softly, easily, and, leaving:

> . . ."If one of these pictures turns out, I'll send you one, when I get home. Okay?"
>
> . . .and here the sweetness comes out, the smile genuine, not simpering, as though she were tasting and enjoying a newly invented word:
>
> "okay" (108)

Earlier in the book, Metcalf had written of the medicine man of the Connibos tribe who:

> felt that george catlin,
> in painting his portrait,
> was employing an ingenious mode
> of stealing his skin (74)

And *I—57* becomes, indirectly, not just an account of how Paul Metcalf steals the skin of Anna Powell. It's the story of how he returns it to her, and the book's reader, by stealing, himself, outward through his own skin and into the world.

—DAVID KADLEC

POETRY AND (MALE?) SEX*

I don't know much about sex but I know what I like. Whenever I hear the word sexuality I reach for my wallet. Your sexual politics is the way you live.

* *A response to a question circulated by Douglas Messerli to several writers: "How do you see your poetry as being related to or as being a product of sexuality or sexual politics?"*

*

A few days ago, a letter was passed on to me in which my essay on Charles Olson, in *Content's Dream,* was taken to task as "unjust" in its critique of *Maximus's* sexual politic. Randy Prus writes:

> Phallocentrism is different from misogyny. What I mean to say is, some men write from the 'balls,' that soft tender spot which the gender is constantly trying to express and yet protect. Hemingway and Mailer write from the phallus, that hard expression of masculinity. Olson, as well as Whitman, as well as myself write from the 'balls.' H.D. in *Notes on Thought and Vision* locates the 'womb' as one center of writing. The 'balls' are the male counterpart of that, as well as to that experience. Gender expression does not mean gender dominance.

Here we see "maleness" claiming the same privileges in contemporary "progressive" ideological space as is accorded to "womanhood" or "blackness." But maleness, like whiteness, like Americanness cannot claim the "rights" of marginality because it remains culturally, politically, socially, and economically dominant. The "imaginal" values of maleness have not been suppressed/discredited/denied but rather vaunted: the struggle for men is to ***unlearn*** masculinity, without substituting any positive value to this gender differential since positive values for maleness (as distinct from "humanness") remain suspect, at least for the present, as socially adaptive strategies to maintain control and power.

One of the most striking features of the current poetry context is the resourcefulness of women, blacks, gays, and other marginalized (though not marginal) groups to assert a powerfully positive identity either in individual writings or through integrally related social formations (readings, publishing, critical writing). White, heterosexual men cannot occupy this ground: for the relevant group affiliation is one that cannot, in good conscience, be advanced: on the contrary, the group solidarity of straight, white men needs to be dissolved not in order to be regrouped in a more "authentically male" fashion but to become dispersed into a ***human*** future that is not now possible to envision. Certainly, men sensitive to this problem may be envious of those who are able to participate in building a group gender identification, and it is not surprising that many men express resentment toward feminist poetries in a variety of ways: for it is precisely the position of the unrepresented and the victimized that straight, white American men are rightly excluded from occupying in any primary way. While men's consciousness raising is a valuable, indeed necessary activity, "men's liberation" is an obscenity; which is not

to say that all human beings are not tyrannized by a social order that tyrannizes any group.

Within this context, the questioning, through poetic methods, of the authoritative structures of our society is useful for both men and women and the poetic works that result will not necessarily be differentiable by gender: but the world they connect to, at least within the context of a non-Utopian reading, surely will be. What seems especially problematic is the reduction of this investigation to biologically reductive categories: the genitals made symbolic. We are so enmeshed within the social coding of gender that we have no way of locating essential biological meanings for sex differences. Biology is not destiny, rather it establishes a ground of possibilities for sociocultural enacting. There are no *knowably* inherent social attributes to maleness or femaleness only socially constructed, or socially asserted, ones. The questioning of essentialist ideologies of gender is one of the richest domains of "modern" poetry and it is little wonder that so many of the most revolutionary writers of the past 250 years have refused, or been unable, to conform to conventional gender and sexual classifications.

Of course, this suggests problems with essentialist feminism as much as masculinism. Social and sexual functions *make* essences. If the socially desired end is equal employment opportunities for all, then this will be what will determine the correlatively equal sharing of infant care, housework, etc. The "essentially" nurturing role of women will be as irrelevant as the learned (or never learned) nurturing role of men faced with the deadening forms of employment available to most of us. The point is not to radically demarcate gender distinctions, which inevitably lead to workplace and economic and status discriminations: not further divisions of labor, that is, but the pooling of these realities. There is real, expressible, pain and loss, as well as gain and pleasure, involved in the forms of alienation that men experience in the workplace or in a single's bar or in a marriage and the *critical* articulation of these experiences is necessary: but these are realities that women and men will more and more share if sexism and phallocentrism are to be overthrown.

*

But what does this have to do poetry and the erotic? It is sometimes hard to understand how the body can be shaped by language—that our ideologies are scleroticized into social flesh, that we live out our grammars with our bodies. Poetry is a place where that grammar can be reforged. Indeed the project of much current poetry that attempts to rupture conventional grammatical and narrative patterns can be understood in terms of just such a sexual politic. At the same time, *as a man,* I have been

concerned with resisting any establishment of new and positive identity formations through such writing practices.

If not gender, what then? The various social roles learned by women and men make for different points of departure in coming to terms with the controlling interests of these roles and that will no doubt be pervasively reflected in individual works. I have tried, in my work, to understand who and what I am without assuming the authenticity of my feelings or sexuality. This has afforded me an unlimited amount of pleasure in writing.

For writing is erotic when sclerotic patterns of communication are violated, especially if this violation isn't left hanging in the fire but comes to fruition. As against the idea that nonnormalizing writing practices unleash a de-creative "libidinal flow" that is otherwise locked up by, or in, language, I would say that the object(s) of my desires is a pro-creative poetry. For there is no prelinguistic, presymbolic domain that is systematically repressed with the acquisition of language but that can be liberated by textual ruptures of the phallocentric symbolic order: an idea that is the last outpost of Romantic ideology in poststructuralist doxa. Rather, the linguistic or semantic or symbolic order are coterminus with the body, its coming into being and its expiration. The presymbolic is, at best, a utopian projection, out of this world (like Romanticism's nonsocial Imagination): literally no*where,* never.

There is no "presymbolic" holdout (hideout); language play is simultaneously, *not consecutively, narratively* constitutive of meaning *and* erotic. Language *as such* is no more "phallic" than it is "clitoral"; and while standard grammar may reflect the (patriarchal) social order, alternative (nonphallic) grammars are simultaneously being realized and repressed. Just as it is necessary to reject the reduction of meaning to utility, it is also necessary to guard against the schizophrenic splitting of meaning from the libidinal flow through which it is enacted. As Samuel Weber has put it, there is no free play only *power plays:* in the interior of any argument for the liberation of libidinal energy trapped by inscription is the demon of phallic play ma(r)king its own unchecked reinscription.

Writing and reading enact a sexual economy in that they open onto an arena of erotic play—release, delay, longing, emptiness, destruction, production, absorption, theatricality, determination, satisfaction, frustration. The sensuous pleasures of words, phrases, and images can never be underestimated as embodying the aesthetic force of a poem. The poetics of pleasure, and the absolute acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of desire—different pleasures for different people—remains a fundamental test of any politics, including any politics of poetry.

Pleasure is always site specific: bound by social and personal histories. There can be no hierarchization of the methods of pleasure (call

them pleasuring principles or the appartuses of the erotic, as you like). If sexual practices are never "absolutely liberatory" in function neither can any claim special legitimacy as being more "natural" than others: in any case, eros does not require such utilitarian justifications. And if it is wished to imagine a liberatory function for sexuality, it is sobering to keep in mind that desire *constitutes* social grammars. Nor is there a "material core" to eros: genital sex, touching a wall, the vision of an empty and dark room, smell, eating bread, dancing (on a threshing floor or in your head), as much as those more hushed(-up) pleasures of the text, are equally sublimations/actualizations—*articulations*—of eros.

When I speak of a procreative poetry, I don't mean that this can be untangled from decreative play. I mean rather to emphasize a sense of a poem's needing no value outside its immediate pleasures: where the value resides in the instantiation of pleasure for itself, the noninstrumental fact of its own activity. The erotic text for which I make my proposition desires to constitute itself by both its disengagements and its engagements, in order—not to leave the social realm but to more materially, sensually, sentiently place itself as lived and felt object in and of the world. In this way, the poem is transformed by the powers of its embodied desires, as each of us is transformed in our journeys from our separate inceptions, from *text* to *work*.

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

RESPONSE TO "LITERACY EFFECTS" BY JED RASULA

Dear Jed:
I think "Literacy Effects. . ." is fascinating, and, if you'll forgive the term, wonderfully entertaining. And it is good to know that one can be a *Sulfur* reader and also seek absorption into things like *thirtysomething* with a clear conscience. But I think there are issues latent in the essay that require more discussion, and which in suggestive ways are related to the recent debate around Language writing in the pages of the aforementioned. My tentative comments are based not so much on what you state as what I feel may be implicit in the gaps. So, to offer them:

• While you mention Godzich and Kittay as immediate sources for your concept of "prose," the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* seems to be the real philosophical spring of your essay (though I don't mean it's at all dark as that brooding book: your section on the "canon" might even have had Adorno and Horkheimer slapping their knees). There are, anyway, coincidences between the idea of an encompassing "prose," and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. Likewise, strong parallels between Adorno's pitch for modernist aesthetics as the last ditch barricade against instrumental rationality, and your projection of linguistically productive forms as privileged modes of resistance to the weave of "literacy effects." If I'm reading you correctly, "prose" can be taken as "mass culture."

• What I find problematic is the way in which that "prose" seems *totalized* as the threatening "other" of a free subjectivity. The force of your argument sets up a binary opposition, and approaches excluding, by implication, the possibility of *differentiating* cultural production according to specific reading formations and discourse practices; or to put it another way, there is an absence of acknowledgment of the *positionality* (diachronicity) of discourse communities, and the possibility of their positive intervention in the cultural field.

• That absence is brought out when you state that you "seek alliance with any practice of writing that refuses to treat binary elements or dual possibilities as injunctions to choose." Writing, as you quote Coolidge, where one does "not finally know whether (one is) reading or writing." But in privileging textual modes that are essentially polysemous (wreading), you seem to have made a rather programmatic choice yourself—one which itself carries the weight of an enjoinder, i.e., that the question of cultural resistance (at least in the realm of poetics) is fundamentally a matter of epistemological affinities. My point is not to suggest that you're being contradictory, but rather to propose that the radical sense of homogeneity and closure you impart to the cultural field impels an overly abstracted hierarchization of discourses (experimental/modernist tradition vs. "first person singular" frames), and a consequent reductive stance toward the possibilities for textual praxis.

• A few days ago, I was reading from Joseph Bruchac's anthology, *The Light from Another Country: Poetry from America's Prisons,* and it struck me how many of the poems could be taxonomized under the broad parameters of your "first person singular," or PSI category. To what extent do the formal qualities of a poem determine whether it can be regarded as "testimony" or "testimonial," inside or outside "normal channels"? Are there reading formations where the "production of self" might represent

an articulation of resistance to the hegemony of "prose"? I raise these questions largely because your description of "wreading" as a "space," "difference," "habitat," in which one comes "to reckon with the spatial mystery of a voiceless speech and a bodiless embodiment," seems almost a kind of negative romanticism that would implicitly regard representational poetic discourses as quantified and reified.

• This isn't to argue against your evocation of "prose" and its power to atomize subjectivity in the very logic of homogenizing experience. But it is to suggest that mass culture is not necessarily a hermetically sealed logos, and that to regard it as such calls into question the legitimacy of theorizing either the specificity of reading formations or the ways in which contestations for those "significant symbols" may have a productively activating use. Lifting from Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's theory of counter-public spheres, I'd propose that the construction—the praxis—of community, around a shared sense of cultural positionality is itself a primary act of resistance to the episteme of "prose"; that through praxis, communities may inscribe interstices of value and communication within which critical stances toward social life are made possible. In this regard, *formal/textual strategies* will have values of use depending, in George Hartley's words, "on their relationship not only to the period, but also to (their) overdetermined location within the social formation" *(Poetics Journal* 6).

• On this matter, there is a homology between the character of your formulations and the early capitalism=narrative/referentiality equations of Silliman and McCaffery. Of course, in many ways, Language writing is the most successful expression of a "counter-public sphere" we've ever had in American poetry. Criticisms of the movement's political significance—even by such fine critics as Altieri and Weinberger—have missed the point by adopting a narrow text-itself approach, rather than considering ways the project has succeeded in problematizing the broader *institutional* text of "poetic" production (in this sense, Benjamin has been insufficiently used as a departure point in studies devoted to the work). Not to agree, of course, that the value of the writing itself is minimal: merging the modernist project of semantic possibility *into* the effort of engaging the ideological bases of signification represents a rich contribution. But the extent to which the conflation has been proposed as a privileged form of praxis (and McGann's *Critical Inquiry* essay, I think, is a fair synthesis of the general sense that's been conveyed) has seemed to exclude a productive dialogization with creative communities working within more normative conceptions of commitment and discourse. The mix seems problematic: on the one hand there's been a "materialist" and

historicizing direction to much of the criticism done within and around the movement, and on the other, a decidedly utopian/idealist stance in the way that non-narrative (wreading) is projected as a "pure" realm for a poetics of resistance.

In that both "prose" and "referentiality" are posited as closed realms —"doxas," the poachable Barthes would put it—no space is left for challenge from within. If the logos has a Manichean echo, it has so here: either zombie-like assimilation, or a principled break with given economies of discourse. As I see it, if there is a significant difference between the outlines of your formulations and those of Language theory, it is that your concept of "wreading" seems to move away from the political hopes of a deconstructive textuality, and into the ethereal realms of Stevensian "fiction."

• What I'm arguing, "when it gets down to it," is that given the odds, any avant-garde practice in American writing that aspires to oppositional consequence must be informed by a recognition that differing textual strategies are always *potentially* useful—and complementary—options within a fluid heteroglossia of discourses. In so many words, that the challenge for writers committed to linguistic and conceptual experiment is how to theorize their cultural intervention without, in Adornean fashion, setting old Lukacs on his head.

Am I wrong in thinking that you feel it is too late in the game for such concerns? It's because I believe these issues have a certain topicality—and that your contribution would be vital to deepening a discussion around them—that I hope you'll correct me.

Sincerely,
KENT JOHNSON

SOME NOTES AMONG ALTAZORS

It's not often a new collection, Cecilia Vicuña's *Palabra Sur* (Grey Wolf Press), kicks off with a masterpiece, Vicente Huidobro's (peer to Vallejo & Neruda) *Altazor*. Eliot Weinberger's magisterial translation, joy

to read, superb piece of American poetry, shows, besides great sagacity for rendering the "untranslatable," a magnificent elegiac breath. Here you have it complete at last, after large helpings in David Guss's fine New Directions anthology of 1981.

*

Elegiac, yes, because: a poem of *flight?* E.W.: "The century's great paean to flight. . .the airplane as a vehicle for ascension." Later: *"Altazor* is a poem of falling, not back to earth. . .but out into space." E.W. also calls it "Einstein space." I find almost unbelievably little ascension in *Altazor.* The sub-title, *A Voyage in a Parachute,* clarifies *fall* but not rise. Without counting, I bet there are ten or more times as many *boats* in *Altazor* as planes; perhaps fifty times as many mentions of *sea* as any kind of air. There is extraordinarily little here of the exhilaration of flight, virtually nothing on the manifold experiences of being up in the sky. The overwhelming direction is *down*—not, I think, in space but in *water/sea/ ocean,* also signifying psyche. Like Neruda, Huidobro is Chilean enough to be devoured by ocean. [For the implications of this kind of entrails-reading, see N.T.: *Archaeology, Elegy, Architecture* in *Sub-Stance,* 28, U. Wisconsin, 1981]

*

Criticism, I am told, agrees on the subject being the fate of poetry in Huidobro's time—but oscillates between a downbeat and an upbeat interpretation of Huidobro's own attitude to poetry's future. Maybe these basic directions in the poem can help decide? Is the fairly systematic review of referential dislocations (mainly, be it said, at the lexical level) running from Cantos 5 to 7 and ending with an "untranslatable" (now translated) trio of pages an optimistic surge towards the future? Or is it (as the only critic I've read so far, Rene de Costa, thinks) a rehearsal of the avant-garde's failure and a Rimbaudian abdication of all hope for a visionary language (itself, of course, a matter for heated debate)? I don't find much encouragement for the positive view in a poem which often seems to me to read like *A Season in Hell.*

*

"Rosicrucian" suggestions: birth of Huidobro on the day of Christ's death [traditionally at 33] (1: numbers are page references); "alone in the middle of the universe" [Dante: *nel mezzo*] (15); the Blakean search for the hour that Satan cannot find (41); man as replacing God (9, 21, 25, 41); refs. to the "hidden rose" (111) etc. of a fall through *self* rather than space, an initiatic fall of a self "who watches himself at work and laughs in his

(own) face," falling from "the heights of his star" [the star it seems to which one is always (astrologically?) chained] (39, 43, 57, 65), "hanging in the parachute of his own prejudices" [trapped in ego?] (23), to "an endless voyaging in the interiors of the self" (27). If "we must change our luck," it is only, repeatedly, through drinking the "pale lucidity of death" to the dregs, the death of the "failed experiment" (25) for "Everything is pain" (29, 35, 43–47, etc.): the Buddhist *dukkha* perhaps which marks the exhaustion of all conditioned things, the picture of the world's future being dismal and contemptible (45–46). It is said, yes, that the greater the height from which you fall, the higher you'll rebound (11), a transformation is possible from *paracaidas* (parafall, parachute) to *parasubidas* (lit.: pararises, E.W.'s parashot) (13), but the poem never dwells long on rising while doing so, abundantly, on falling. It is only at the very bottom of "shipwreck" fall that the poet sees the hidden rose (111) and even in the one truly ascensional sequence in the poem, when the earth gives birth to a tree (rooted, of course), Huidobro continues "falling across your body from your heights to your depths" (57).

The fear of giving way to any ascensional hope is constantly re-iterated. "The airplane carries a new language / To the mouth of the eternal skies" (73) but, only a few lines later, the plane is "drowsy" and "the clouds turn to stone" (75), or: "The sky waits for an airplane / And I hear the dead laughing under the earth" (149). Indeed, anything rising seems unthinkable without being linked to the sea-fall: "My swallow anchors / Its sources in the sea" (157); "And waves are the wings in my blue" (143); "My lies smell of heaven / And that's all / And now I'm the sea" (143). In turn, the death through whose spaces the parachute interminably falls (3 & ss.)—as far into the poem as p. 109, Huidobro is still talking of "aerial burials" because all of air is absorbed into sea—this death is indissolubly associated with dream (3) and with the sea: death "sitting by the edge of the sea" (115); the sea in the depths of the tomb (119–121) and so forth.

*

Huidobro's critique of avant-garde poetic procedures—Cubist, Dada, Surrealist, etc.—, if this is being read right, appears to follow the same pattern of fear of ascensional success. The "remedy" passage begins with a call to "revive the languages," put "circuit breakers in the sentences," "cataclysms in the grammar," "beautiful madness in the life of the word" (81), leads through an exaltation of the "pure word and nothing more," "The simple sport of words," appearing to end in "Single combat between chest and sky" [note "combat," but indicating freedom one would assume]. Then, however, there is something which seems very ambivalent to me: "Then nothing, nothing / Spirit whisper of the wordless phrase" (83). In the same vein, the passage at p. 87: "The sea waits to conquer /

So there's no time to lose / Then / Ah then / Beyond the last horizon / We'll see what there is to see" [curious echo of the bear-over-the-mountain, repeated at 105] seems heavily ironic, as well as "so sad" (95), indeed tragically dangerous: "There's no time to lose / The steamer has the day marked / For the dangerous holes stars open in the sea / It could fall into the central fire" (99) and the Jouvian "Goodbye one must say goodbye" of p. 101. Straight after this, a promise of sap springing up, yet, again, immediately: "The tree is afraid of going too far / It's afraid and looks back in anguish" (101) and "It's afraid I say the tree is afraid / Of going too far from the earth" (103) and, again, "Aviator be careful with stars / Careful with dawn / Lest the astronaut become a sunicide[1] / The sky has never had as many roads as this / Never has it been so treacherous" (105). The poet is lost in night, sea and splendor of "blind death" which is what there is to see "beyond the last horizon" (105). It may be that Huidobro is simply pointing to the massive difficulty of doing anything new in this age of the new but I don't see him raise a single cry of real hope out of any of it.

*

The question of whether the ever-increasingly "untranslatable" text is indeed so or not must be linked to whether Huidobro wanted some degree of referentiality to be present to the very end of the poem—or not and this would also reflect on his hope, or lack of it, for poetry's future. E.W. clearly feels that Huidobro was not after pure sound in his search for a new language: "the 'untranslatable' poem is simply one which has not yet found its translator." On the other hand, the statement that, in the neologisms, "no two Spanish readers could ever agree upon" the various components of the word—so that another English version could be "utterly dissimilar to this one" leaves us free to feel that, less than any other poetry, this kind of poetry has a definitive translator. E.W. agrees: "The game of *Altazor* has an infinite number of moves, and I look forward to its next translation match." This is perhaps one place where poetry can be made by all—as surrealism wanted it to be: while admiring the brilliance of E.W.'s own solutions [it would take far more space than is available to unpack his extensive labor in detail], a dictionary and a knowledge of Spanish will allow any poet to try for another "match" with the neologisms.

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Can we deny Huidobro's claim to have found the key to "eterfinifrete" [the word can be read backwards or forwards—E.W.'s "infiniternity" cannot, though it gains in precision]? It occurs to me that the

degree of ambivalence is such throughout *Altazor* that it will always be possible to take opposite views of its intentions. This may be the genius of the thing: we may be in the presence of a both/and situation. The ambivalences are constitutive, however, and not due—as so often in Neruda, for instance—to a simple lack of linguistic energy. *Altazor* would be a triumph if only because, while being without any ostensible "subject," it manages to give such a sense of energy and purposeful direction. This is so especially in its totalizations: the Rimbaudian poet as total man (3, 7, 39–41, 137) indeed as total world (141); woman as a remembrance of other lives/worlds and guiding spirit of this one (69–71); the all-embracing shipwreck of the tomb (119–121), etc. The old truth: that great tragedy is mysteriously uplifting prevails as in all major elegiac work: I am moved at the fact that an early title of the poem seems to have been *AltAZUR*. More than this, however: the language is taut at all times and completely surmounts—as Vallejo's does—the sentimentality and vapid rhetoric endemic to so much Latin American writing. This is a poem to live with—in both its original and its English versions.

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[1]Note: "sunicide" is E.W.'s translation of "auricida," no doubt from *aur*ora (dawn) of the previous line, also echoing *aeronaut*a in the same line.

—NATHANIEL TARN

THE FLOWERS OF UNCEASING COINCIDENCE by Robert Kelly, Station Hill Press, 1988

"Analyzing difference / severs." So begins Robert Kelly's first major long poem since *The Loom* in 1975. Unlike that previous endeavor, this lengthy text is composed of 672 small bursts of energy. While we might at first imagine such a work to appear fragmentary and disjoint, Kelly shows us otherwise. He invites us to draw-out correspondences amidst the seemingly disparate. In many respects he is continuing here to write the same poem he has been writing all his life, in other words the unfolding of his existence.

So Kelly utilizes, rather than analyzes, difference. And the result is an employment of the utility of language both invigorating and difficult. "What is more subtle than difference," asks Kelly. He proceeds to weave a very subtle text. When he tells us, "don't make sense make difference," we are being called to a new sensibility. What we sense is both internal and external and eternally the point at which the two meet and are inevitably separated. Thus "every name's a brand new knife to cut / where proprioceptive fibers terminate." In this reality where naming is knowing, "everything I see is a sort of remembering." Each petal is its own flower yet part of a larger, whole continuum. Kelly is, in a constructivist manner, assembling his flowers from language into appearance. He seeks to piece together the peace of language by writing multifoliate directives to the self. The result is a monumental language experiment where "each episode is an experiment / in how tight you can tug some stuff together / and how far you can blow it apart."

Language is that malleable "stuff" Kelly refers to. And, as he states, "language like the rest of us / always talks about itself." Thus he writes "trusting pure syllables" yet, on the other hand, he wants "to get there without language." In other words, he wants the best of both worlds. And when he can't have that, he settles for what language says to him, through him. "I set out to dismember language / but went too far / and now myself am spoken." Consequently and consequentially, "a word is something that happens to you." Kelly, then, is a man who, having given up on language as a way of conveying meaning, discovers afresh what he means to say. When we cease to exert our will over words, finally they speak to us. "Sense / you make by finding / but not finding it."

This is the paradox, that words tell us their sensible story despite our selves. Our mystery is unfolded in the participation with the story being told. Thus "enigmas are answered by the words that state them." To a greater or lesser degree the poet per se is relegated to the position of scribe, describing what scriptions are given him.

Words do not, in and of themselves, mean anything. They are, however, an invitation to meaning. And when Kelly allows language to work through him, i.e. when he surrenders to language, he gives up any sense of pre-ordained meanings inherent in words. So he can say of his art that, "meaning / is ownership / and this art / is for those with nothing to say." The act of surrender (and it is an act, rather than passive resignation) is continuous and continual and requires vigilance, without which the traditional modes of writing with meaning in mind return with all of their horrible displacement. Kelly must force himself to remain relentless to the end of the quest (as if there were an end to it) for, as he says, "the tradition of meaning is pervasive / hard to relax even in the flower found." For

Kelly, then, meaning in poetry is what language broods in the garden of its own accord.

The flowers continue to bloom in us as we allow them to, and they correspond with the material world about us. Naming *is* knowing, and "to know the name / of any flower is / to live in it." The interconnectedness of things becomes increasingly clear and apparent. Thus the flowers seem to unceasingly coincide until they do indeed coincide. The world can be seen as presenting us to ourselves in a constant stream of petals, as a narrative which might only at first appear to be disjoint. But Kelly directs us through the surface layer, saying "don't disconcerted by the drift of narrative / suppose coherence where's only the continuous / event seamless but story is one thread."

What, then, is the story? The story is Kelly, the Kelly we've come to know. Still working under the permissions, he speaks the womanly god. "The most mysterious faculty of a man: the woman," he says. The quest for her runs from internal to external throughout the text. She is simultaneously the thread which weaves the text while governing the textual unfolding. Thus "the whole structure of our structure is meant for Her / who is not the priestess of but God itself." This genderless perfection is attainable, only through immersion in our Other. We risk being devoured by her but, more readily, we risk projecting her into tangibility and losing ourselves to lust. "Any sentence is the history of a passion," claims Kelly. While this text is not as "lust-infested" as some of Kelly's previous work we nevertheless confront plenty of nakedness, skin, breasts, thighs, lips and mouths. This language arrives in spurts. Kelly redeems himself through his own "capacity to carve / verse out of distress out of / unsatiable appetite."

At its best, then, this text seems under an appropriate lunar sway, and settles into its element. "O lady the lunatic inner calmness leads to you," exclaims Kelly. He freely confesses, "I am starved for light / the ordinary that falls from the moon," and reminds us that "all her life she has been giving back / all that light as passion." We are nourished by the light of "that cold white skull up there / whose light is the black where we begin / ghost embryo mother cavern athanor." (We are reminded of the symbolic attributes of the Mother archetype as expounded by Erich Neumann in his seminal study *The Great Mother.)* All in all this is Kelly "trying to live by the rules of night." The fact that Kelly seeks Her passionately passionless calm allows this poem to resonate with a meaningful warmth which would otherwise be lacking in such a language constructed text.

When Kelly says "the world is not created it is found/ forever incomplete forever perfect," he is speaking as much about the world of the text itself. Kelly discovers, and, subsequently, we discover, the gem relative to its mineral matrix and, simultaneously, the gem with all of its internal

flaws. Inevitably, then, there are flaws here. When, for example, Kelly tells us a deer looks "like a cow that went to Smith," the analogy falls flat. Furthermore, "brownish tint or protestant" fails in its attempted consonance, "not awed by that black sperm" does little to awe us either, "a monkey masturbating on a radio" comes across as nothing new or shocking, "gyzm of our corny throb" is a bit *too* corny, and "zen cents fool" seems rather worthless. Yet Kelly reminds us that "an answer is not obvious / in a world of out-takes."

We might be tempted also to criticize the length of the text in its entirety. Granted, wordiness is worldliness, but the poem does not engage us throughout. Sections 175 through 385, roughly, prove most engaging on second reading, yet we are left with a lengthy introductory sequence and even more lengthy disengagement. This difficulty, it should be remembered, is inherent in any work of such risk and daring. While in hindsight we might see opportunities for further editing, such an action runs antithetical to the initial process of composition. Then, again, "Whoever knows her best knows her silence." Where is the silence here?

"There is nothing your mouth doesn't say," Kelly tells us. And, to be certain, he lets very little go unsaid here. He covers much of the ground of the going and coming, coming and going of our existence, all the while adding that "it's not all going and not all coming / the best of it persists a quiet way." The quietness is what we have left to take away from the text with us. What works so very well here is Kelly's relentless focus which generates us through myriad words to that silence which is Hers. We are propelled into a stunned knowing, or the realm of what Kelly calls the "abruptly revealed."

The poem is long and the words are many "because from emptying a self a truth appears." This truth is the story of ourselves we tell ourselves. The story must be written and told in the living. It is a pre-condition for our existence, from dismembering to remembering. "In this way gods are made and fact / imagined into shape and shape erased / to leave a hunger for that lucid doubt / of which Truth is the most urgent fiction."

— DAVID C.D. GANSZ

INDIFFERENCE: MIKE BIDLO AND RON SILLIMAN*

Mike Bidlo's recent show of scrupulously accurate copies of reproductions of Picasso's women, rescaled to the size of the size of the originals (an awkward number of genitives in that phrase but let it stand for something at issue here) has now been taken down, each canvas placed in the darkness of a crate—crates and darkness indistinguishable from those enclosing original Picassos in corporate vaults, and indistinguishable as well from those Marcel Broodthaers, in an installation, placed beside post-card reproductions of art-historical "masterpieces." Exchangeable crates, exchangeable darkness, exchangeable art in an unembarrassable system of commodities operating under the canopy of indifference—this is the resilient edifice into which Bidlo has been laboriously poking a finger over the years.

I write "laboriously" by way of setting off Bidlo's conceptual gestures from those of, for instance, Duchamp (the Ready-Mades), Warhol (his assembly-line silkscreens) or even the so-called "Dogg" (those installations of spare-tire cases). In a climate still saturated with notions of value as defined by quantities of labor, Bidlo's painstaking, handmade executions satisfy the mainstream art-world's requirement of craftsmanly sweat while simultaneously redefining its Cult of Originality. Between these poles of good behavior and calculated sabotage there exists a curious *idiot savant* tension, a contradiction which seems to threaten the cancellation of both terms. This, I'll attempt to show, is not the case however, because Bidlo's project succeeds in having its subversive cake and the consumption thereof.

But to arrive at that or any conclusion here it will be necessary to travel via mention of Benjamin's essential "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and Baudrillard's apocalyptic extension of its terms in *Simulations*—works in which Bidlo and other "simulationist" artists find elegant, sexy theoretical footing and without which their work is basically unthinkable.

Benjamin, as every Frankfurt schoolgirl knows, situates the power of the fine arts in their uniqueness as objects. Each work's unreproducible materiality and the specific, *verifiable* history of this materiality he calls the "aura" and it is precisely this aura which mechanical reproduction fails by definition to transmit. (Poetry as essentially untranslatable is an analogous notion.) Besides the inevitable distortion of color, scale, and

* Note: citations as follows: *S* = ***Simulations*** by Jean Baudrillard (Semiotext(e), 1983); *PU* = ***The Political Unconscious*** by Frederic Jameson (Cornell University Press, 1981); *I* = ***Illuminations*** by Walter Benjamin (Schocken, 1968); *W* = ***What*** by Ron Silliman (The Figures, 1988); *NS* = ***The New Sentence*** by Ron Silliman (Roof, 1987).

texture entailed by a photographic rendering of a Picasso, there is the inescapable fact of a *new object*—the reproduction itself—having been brought into existence. This object bears both an enfeebling dependence on the original as well as, by contrast, being subject itself to exact replication: Memorex. If this meant merely the creation of more aura-less trash, our pristine relation to "Les Demoiselles D'Avignon" would be undamaged. But in its crude two-dimensional, ahistorical fidelity, the reproduction's disseminating promiscuity "decays" the Picasso's aura, diluting its unique material quiddity with well-intentioned reports whose effects are those of Local News coverage on a John Cage performance. Hence the darkness of corporate vaults: art sapped of aura, indifferent.

If it's helpful to see Bidlo's gesture as the enlargement of a "quote" to the edges of the frame, Baudrillard's *Simulations* might be read as the blowing-up and application of Benjamin's model of the aura to all forms of representation, where the momentum of its logic culminates in Baudrillard's assertion that ours is "the age of simulation," in which "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models." The real converts to "a hyperreal, the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (*S*, p. 3). Like Benjamin (and like Marx), Baudrillard casts his analysis of the present against a revisionist historical foil. Whereas Benjamin contrasts the contemporary Age of Mechanical Reproduction with Medieval, Renaissance and early Modern eras in which art objects possessed either sacral or secularized cultic unapproachability (another definition of aura), Baudrillard posits a vaguer, more inclusive historical generality which he summarizes as follows:

> All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference (*S*, pp. 2–3).

The appeal of this hyperbolic, Nietzchean discourse for a post-Warholian art-world is obvious. But if *Simulations* seduces with the additional attraction of embodying in its structure and argument the weightless circulation of models it thematizes, this very feature, at least for readers still mired in desires for "documentation," constitutes its critical flaw. For Baudrillard's is a logic which, when he rides it beyond the realms of art,

enthnology and capital, etc., assumes the nastiest of postmodern science-fictions—his absurd contention, for example, that *wars* no longer exist. (Placing one in the weird position of countering that scars on tortured bodies amount to more than hyperreal hieroglyphics and attest to a Real whose hold on its subjects has been left very much unbroken, has if anything been empowered, by the vertigo of unmoored representations and the First World's passive sanctioning of them.)

But quarantined in the dimension (the dimensionlessness) of artistic production, Baudrillard's positions clarify a real irreality. As we have seen, he and Benjamin fix their critiques on the axis of the interrelated issues of authenticity, origin, and originality. Despite its pessimistic conclusion regarding the fate of painting, Benjamin's dialectical-materialist analysis obliges him to acknowledge (if only in a footnote) the crucial role of copies in the defining of originality *per se,* in "differentiating and grading authenticity" *(I,* p. 245). "To develop such differentiations," he adds, "was an important function of the *trade* in works of art" (my emphasis). Having apparently ransacked even the essay's footnotes, Baudrillard elevates this calculus to the status of a law of the Simulationist Age:

> It is always a question of proving the real by the imaginary, proving truth by scandal, proving work by the strike, proving the system by crisis and capital by revolution. . .without counting:—proving theatre by anti-theatre,—proving art by anti-art. . .etc., etc. *(S,* p. 36).

To operate, in other words, this system of circulating simulacra depends on the periodic production of false antinomies whose function is to delineate an illusion of the real where there is, in reality *(?),* but the self-propagation of groundless and hence value-neutral models of other models.

What then, in these terms, is the force of a Bidlo copy of a reproduction of a Picasso? Is its relation to the original more or less parasitic for being painted in the colors and flattened remove of the original's aura? Does its status as a unique object with a specific material history place it in the same category as non-simulationist works, or in one of its own or the simulationists' own, a deuterocanon? Does it function to reinject a false antinomy—that of simulation—into a system of simulations whose operation hinges upon occasional staging of the binary, copy-original? What would be the status and effect of a simulated Bidlo, of a forged Bidlo? Does it matter? Are these the wrong questions?

Here are responses from the Castelli pamphlet used to advertise Bidlo's exhibit. Robert Pincus-Witten quotes from his journal:

18 November 1986

Earlier this month luncheoned with Bidlo, visiting him in his new studio in the West 30s, a hook in from a really bad stretch of Crack Avenue. The studio is in a renovated loft building and handsomely looks north over the city. Bidlo is now painting all of Picasso, the great works, as it were, across Picasso's whole career. Odd. Picasso in reproduction becomes Bidlo's Nature, his "motif," so that, in a certain sense, he is neither copying nor appropriating though of course that is exactly what he is doing. . . .

We talked, naturally enough, of the virtiginous (*sic*) ascent of the simulationists whose names have been on all lips of late. Bidlo waxed eloquent. . . .

In the past I chided Bidlo for having to think up things to do. Figuring out what to do next is a problem, perhaps a failing, of conceptual art. But Bidlo has turned the tables. . . .

For so long it seemed that painters, abstractionist as well as those who worked after nature, had the edge over the conceptualists, since, after all, their next move emerged from the very practice of painting itself and not from the act of thinking. Bidlo just may be the conceptualist who has pried himself free from that fundamental flaw of conceptualism.

Barbara Jakobson offers the following confession:

As interested now in the spirit of the present as I was in January 1958 when I bought Small Green Target from Jasper Johns' first exhibit at Leo Castelli, I learned in 1983 of a painter called Mike Bidlo who had spent a few years "becoming" Jackson Pollock. I hot-footed it over to his studio in Queens at P.S. 1 and stood in a state of amused amazement as Mike unrolled one "masterpiece" after another—"Autumn Rhythm," "Lavender Mist," "One." Instantly it seemed possible to me to finally own a Pollock. This is Bidlo's compelling attraction. He has desanctified the past, made a kind of forbidden desire attainable.

And Robert Rosenblum muses on the ways in which

This growing number of artists working as Sorcerer's Apprentices can be so varied that we are able to express enthusiasm or indif-

ference toward this or that replicator, instantly detecting the individual contours beneath the disparate facades of presumably slavish imitation. As such, it is a minor miracle that in Mike Bidlo's current "Picasso Retrospective," Picasso's not exactly shrinking personality seems totally trampled under foot.

So much for the Shock of the New and the permanence of any erosion of the Cult of Author-Genius. And Gerald Graff's remark that Late Capitalism is the avant garde suddenly seems less shocking as well. "If a fake £," Marx writes in the *Grundisse,* "were to circulate in place of the real one, it would render absolutely the same service in circulation as a whole as if it were genuine."

In this context, there has been no *fundamental* change in the status of Bidlo's work as it moved from "alternative spaces" (these, as "alternative" implies, are simply *other* places) to Castelli and MOMA. Whatever nervousness or true vertigo it might have experienced from the "questionable taste" of Bidlo's joke the art-world has converted into recognition which equals consumption which equals money. If Bidlo ever contemplated applying his talent to the kind of forgery which is punishable by law, the art-world's lucrative ceremonialization of his transgressive impulses has surely banished the thought. A buffer-zone of elaborate discourse encloses the simulationist gesture, thereby adding it to the array of existent art-commodities (both as "original" *and* "copy of masterpiece"). And, why not, thereby minimalizing the number of actual forgeries at large in the international art-market, some quantity X of undetonated plastic explosives planted under the desks of professional critics and curators—whose stake in "telling the difference" remains a real however much within a hyperreal.

But poetry explodes nothing? As Ron Silliman writes in *What,* "Art is the craft / of New York City." And the indifference here is of a different kind. *What* is composed of inter-allusive puns of varying degrees of shamelessness ("Platitudes / of the past aghast."), epigrams ("Irony's a form of aggression / that wants to be liked."), O'Hara-esques ("When I read this poem / David Bromige is still married to Sherril. . ."), Objectivistic Haikus ("Stain / the beets make / over cottage cheese."), pocket *ideologiekritiks* (". . .to not / choose is merely to conceal / one's choice: we have no ideology, we just do what's right.") and, perhaps "above all," meta-commentaries:

It is not that
there is no narrative
here (each sentence
is a narrative,

each line *moves)*
but that there is
no hierarchy
of narratives (not even
the story of the
poem), no sentence
to which the others
(all the others) defer
and are ranked
(the map is not
built about the city). *(W,* p. 101)

In short, this is r=e=a=d=i=n=g. Invisible equal signs between sentences assure each the same status in the poem's polity. Like Bidlo, Silliman invokes the principle of equality, of indifference. However, he does so not to circumscribe the power relations between works (originality, precedence) but those between internal artistic units—for Silliman, those of the sentence. It remains problematic whether, by defining the terms of reception, such signature meta-insistences do tend to dominate the rest of the poem. "Refunctioning" "bourgeois" poetics through hybridization and disjunction (as versus, say, the morphemic atomizations of P. Inman), Silliman's project is Brechtian in its emphasis on the forces (poetic and social, the poetic as social) contending for our affirmation. It is an extensively-theorized project: "The social role of the poem places it in an important position to carry the class struggle *for* consciousness to the level *of* consciousness" *(NS,* p. 17). And theory, like an aesthetic Career Services office, "functions in poetic practice through the selection of goals and strategies" *(NS,* p. 59). The practice results most often in the pleasure of the poetically and socially recognizable retooled to the texture of a bland, disjunctive seriality—social realism, as written by Ludwig Dreiser, circa 1986:

Her hair up in a bun with pencils stuck through it.
The buck stops here. The mourning
of the logicians. Words spill forth,
adjuncts of a mind that won't quit,
froth of nuance lathers meaning, hiding
denotation's hard shell, itself a game
of the missing pea. *(W,* p. 110)

Everything is here, all the figures, including how (and how not) to read them. *What*'s aesthetic thresholds, its poetics of calibrated play and self-control, have their ground in Silliman's faith in the scientificity of

Marxist political economy and cultural criticism—in, as Frederic Jameson writes, "the vision of a moment in which the individual subject would be somehow fully conscious of his or her determination by class and would be able to square the circle of ideological conditioning by sheer lucidity and the taking of thought" *(PU,* p. 283). While in the case of the simulationist xeroxing of Modernism's canon it is the art market which reflexively attempts to absorb a Bidlo's dangerous mirror games, thereby exposing its own ideological valences; in ideologically "correct" writing such as Silliman's, it is the writing itself which is given the task of critique. To a certain extent this inevitably results in a perverse ideological dimension: one more deeply hidden because more explicit—a Purity Complex. And to the extent that this species of Language writing recommends itself on the basis of its ideological self-implication and of more "objective" models for representations of social material relations (see "The Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto" *Social Text,* 19/20, Fall 88) it reframes itself in the discourse of mere displacement.

As Marcuse suggests in *The Aesthetic Dimension,* there "may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht." Lost in the overdeterminations of the art market's response to simulationism and in Silliman's dialectically-defined poetics of calculation is the political role of the undetermined, of the incalculable, in art. The formal cancellations of difference in the works of Bidlo and Silliman all but eliminate this elusive but essential dimension whose power, according to Marcuse, is that of estrangement and "the radical, transcendent goals of change."

—THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

"TANGANYIKA STRUT": SOME RECENT SETS*

"Mateso," Master Musicians of Tanzania, *Mateso* (Triple Earth).

"Wawili Tunapendani," Abdulla Mussa Ahmed and Seif Salim Saleh, *Taarab 1: The Music of Zanzibar* (Globe Style).

"Yaar Daadi Mukhasi Phearaan Dardi," Muhammed Abdullah Tibet-balqal and Ensemble, *Kashmir: Traditional Songs and Dances, Volume II* (Nonesuch Explorer).

"Jane Kis Tarha," Najma Akhtar, *Oareeb* (Triple Earth).

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"Bhajan: Bhaja Man Nande Nandan Gidhari," Begum Parween Sultana, *Indian Vocal Music* (Amigo).

"Toumné Jab Julfé Parichane Sawarane Hoga," Ustad Jafar Husain Khan and Ensemble, *Kawwali: Chant soufi de l'Uttar Pradesh* (Maison des Cultures du Monde).

"3/4's of 4/4," Amina Claudine Myers, *Song for Mother E* (Leo).

"Hana Hana Male Hbibti Madjatch," Cheb Khaled, *Hada Raykoum* (Triple Earth).

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"Dja Yadhak," Fadela, *Fadela* (Attitude).

"Lala Sadia," Chab Hamid, *Le Disque d'Or du Rai* (New Pictures).

"Botika Na Lela," Papa Wemba, *Siku Ya Mungu* (Black Music).

"Adam's Apple," Wayne Shorter, *Adam's Apple* (Blue Note).

"Domani," Andrew Hill, *Shades* (Soul Note).

"Taht," Cecil Taylor Segments II (Orchestra of Two Continents), *Winged Serpent (Sliding Quadrants)* (Soul Note).

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"Serene," Eric Dolphy, *Unrealized Tapes* (West Wind).

"I Am Waiting," Cassandra Wilson, *Point of View* (JMT).

* Anyone who has read *Bedouin Hornbook* (Callaloo, 1986) can't help but come away with the sense that Nathaniel Mackey has one of the most incisive and bouyant musical imaginations around. While his writings offer ingenious solutions to the problem of how to convey the intangible suspirations of music in verbal form, there is another forum which Mackey is equally master of—broadcasting. For many years he has hosted a radio program called "Tanganyika Strut" on KUSP in Santa Cruz, California. Having heard the program countless times during the years, I have been awed and charmed by the way Mackey's programming decisions are as eloquently instructive as his writing. Juxtaposition of cuts generally draws on submerged stylistic threads not at all obvious, but just *right* when you hear them. At my request Mackey has provided some of the sequences from his enlightening program.—J.R.

"Love Is," Dewey Redman, *The Struggle Continues* (ECM).
"Dear Lord," John Coltrane, *Transition* (Impulse!).
"Ballad," John Tchicai Orchestra, *Merlin Vibrations* (Plainisphare).

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"Preludio Pra Nana," Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, *Irresistible Forces* (MCA/Impulse!).
"Cono," Salif Keïta, *Soro* (Stern's Africa).
"Sueño Con Serpientes," Silvio Rodriguez, *Días y Flores* (Victoria).
"Eu e Agua," Maria Bethânia, *Maria* (RCA).
"Papa Damballah," Toto Bissainte, *Toto Bissainte chante Haïti* (Arion).

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"Love Is A Key," The Viceroys, *We Must Unite* (Trojan).
"Run Come Rally," Dadawah, *Peace and Love* (Trojan).
"Amis, Je Ne Supporte Plus Votre Eloignement," Cheikh Abdelaziz ben Mamoud and Ensemble, *Soulamia de Tunisie* (Arion).
"Mothers of the Veil," Ornette Coleman and Prime Time, *In All Languages* (Caravan of Dreams).
"No Simple Explanations," Jayne Cortez and the Firespitters, *Maintain Control* (Bola).
"Laye Fall," Youssou N'Dour, *Djamil: Inédits 84–85* (Celluloid).

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"Que Loucura," Luiz Melodia, *Claro* (Braziloid).
"Kua' Sanzala," Bonga, *Africa Roots, Volume 4* (Melkweg).
"No Te Asombres," Angel Canales, *Ya Es Teimpo* (Selanac).
"Abuella," Billy Bang Sextet, *Live at Carlos 1* (Soul Note).
"Artesano del Espacio," Los Van Van, *Sandunguera* (Messidor).

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"My Little Suede Shoes," Sonny Stitt, *Stitt Plays Bird,* (Atlantic).
"My Experience on the Raper Band," Lord Invader and His Calypso Group, *Calypso Travels* (Folkways).
"Calypso Be," Young Tiger with the Calypso Serenaders, *Caribbean Connections: Black Music in Britain in the early 1950s, Volume 2* (New Cross).
"Barbados," Charlie Parker, *Original Bird: The Best of Bird on Savoy* (Savoy).

"Jahbero," Fats Navarro, *The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Volume 2* (Blue Note).

"Blue Lights," Clifford Jordan and John Gilmore, *Blowing In From Chicago* (Blue Note).

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"Rock Chair, I Told You To Rock," Rich Amerson, Earthy Anne Coleman and Price Coleman, *Negro Folk Music of Alabama: Religious* (Ethnic Folkways).

"Angels," Albert Ayler, *The Village Concerts* (ABC/Impulse!).

"On A Country Road," John Carter, *Fields* (Gramavision).

"Long Distance Call," Muddy Waters, *Rolling Stone* (Chess).

"Can't Hold Out Much Longer," Little Walter, *The Best of Little Walter* (Chess).

"Backwater," Last Exit, *Last Exit* (Enemy).

"Emathanjeni," *Zulu Songs from South Africa* (Lyrichord).

•

"Merina," *Musique Malgache* (Ocora).

"Khomo E Khunoena," Majakathatha, *Sheshwe: The Sound of the Mines* (Rounder).

"Megwaza," Johnny Dyani, *Witchdoctor's Son* (SteepleChase).

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"Ntin'oba," Pierre Akendengué, *Owende* (Le Chant du Monde).

"Athamourthiou," Ahcene Adjroud, *Adounith* (Globe Style).

"Dashti," Mohammad Musavi and Jamshid Mohebbi, *Iran 3 et 4: Anthologie de la musique traditionelle* (Ocora).

"November 1981," Bill Dixon, *November 1981* (Soul Note).

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"Yaabint," Kuusow "Kurtunwaarey," *Jamiila: Songs From A Somali City* (Original Music).

"Las Mil y Una Noches," Juan Peña Lebrijano and the Andalusian Orchestra of Tangier, *Encuentros* (Ariola).

"Que No Me Quería," Pepe de la Matrona, *Pepe de la Matrona, Volume 1* (Hispavox).

"Easter procession at the temple of La Macarena," *Portrait of Andalusia* (Argo).

"Saeta," Miles Davis, *Sketches of Spain* (Columbia).

*

"Aïn Salah," Clifford Thornton and the Jazz Composer's Orchestra, *The Gardens of Harlem* (JCOA).

"Ellahi Yelt'ha Bhemmou," Hsissen, *Hsissen, Volume 5* (Les Artistes Arabes Associés).

"Yir Thayri," Ouardia, *Assirem* (Globe Style).

"Encuentro Final (Tarara)," José Heredia Maya and the Andalusian Orchestra of Tetuan, *Macama Jonda* (Ariola).

"La Tarara," Camarón, *La Leyenda del Tiempo* (Phillips).

"Yo No Me Siento Rico," José Menese, *Cantes de José Menese* (RCA).

*

"Kanuayi," *Sanza and Guitar Music of the Bena Luluwa of Angola and Zaire* (Lyrichord).

"Adarrum," *Afro-Brazilian Religious Songs* (Lyrichord).

"Festa de Candomblé," Martinho de Vila, *Novas Palavras* (RCA).

"Quem Usa Antena é Televisão," Bezerra de Silva, *Alô Malandragem, Maloca o Flagrante!* (RCA).

—NATHANIEL MACKEY

ELEGIAC MEASURES

Emerson on the English, Cowper's *Letters,* Boswell's *Hebrides* (I've been reading Gilbey's *Barbara Celarent* and am in love with examples) all have Everyman editions. These I have even referred to in a poem by number (Swinnerton's *Georgian Literary Scene).* What is Cobbett for, what Nietzsche, if not an irritable reaching out after something hoped impaled on pique, the trap as a feared engine. Produce enough syllogisms and the Lady won't hear Comus coming. As we pull away from them do they mat down, make a path. It's easy for literary people to map themselves with clots of reading, easier if there's a romantic strain to all the books. How people care for each other in *Dog Years* is at odds with what the society is up to. The business of being an artist changes for Truitt as her daughters get pregnant. Wittgenstein appears on psychology and law, and it's as if what we were getting to know with difficulty younger is nearly codified, Corpus Juris rather than map, pressed fiber-

board. There is a shift in whether one needs to read a book or not. And it is felt as a shift in tension in one's milieu.

Yesterday I wrote an elegy for Butterick, and it is about the larger echoes given off by poems in journals when poets die, not that it's a convention but that it's a slight laceration to see one. Why is it you speaking and not another. How important are you here. Perhaps I want to say that verse is not, as it stands, adapted to mortuary epistles.

Give over it, there's a leaving off, perhaps a feeling that nothing can be done, almost a politeness of not wanting a poem to help. This may be a feeling that any elegy for someone in the trade exploits a milieu or holds a lifetime of interest for ransom. Day Lewis I think has a "Little Gidding" poem, about the tablet on the wall and what Eliot means to him or the mythy thought of him, so polite, so religious. What can one say to it? I'm almost glad it's written. I'd write about its lines. In the eighteenth century they *sink* into the grave. Condemned to hope's delusive mine, what a thing to say, compared to Tom writes better than I do. The decision to write prose poems may be to escape an atrocity of shape. Verse assumes everything lives that doesn't thud like a small mammal in a coffee can ready for burial.

Limousines are everywhere in this city, tucked up the apartment drive next to the Brattle druggist whose customers carry him perfumes, and Billy Barnum in a doorway performing in white satin, and holding them too. Past grandeurs abound, though Harvard graduates are way down on the Forbes list. That the college depended too much on its cultural capital is clear, even the law and business schools declined, and I am tempted to say it's from an enduring myopia toward the fine arts except as monuments. The poets they hire are not significant, when they could have any. The audiences at poetry readings seem like hobbyists, aides de culture of the worst sort. Boston College's (for Kenner and Forche) are much larger and more lively. Still, I've the sense lately that audience as such, as a consideration, matters less now than a poem's imagined milieu, and this is different from its imagined audience, if any. In a sense a poem hears other poems. For a long time you could think everything in Palgrave talked to each other, and in a sense (now plotted) Palgrave was the best magazine. If poetry became lyrical psychology this was its mandate. No one has yet done this for twentieth-century verse, partly because it would still (now) split. "Lyric" (especially if you excerpt) holds much, but we need a whole chapter for Knopf poets, as I think of them even when they're Little, Brown or Harper's, Amy Clampitt, Mary Oliver, perhaps Linda Gregg, and at the peak of audience appeal Sharon Olds, whose poems impressed me skimmed, then made me angry. It's not enough to say they sell a sensibility, though this leads them to select for content to display it as shamelessly as Tennyson may be thought to

have. More likely with this accessible verse we are back to eighteenth-century pamphleteering, anonymous quarto poems appearing with a splash to drench aficionados, Hockney's cut-paper pools leaving the viewer wet. Paper-wet. From *Absalom and Achitophel* (is Diane Wakoski our Dryden?) through *The Dunciad,* you could say that the confessional poets are self-satirists but that now the English Georgic, that C.S. Lewis calls the Treatise Poem (Ashbery's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* our best modern example) through the verse epistle and poem nearly talking to a social awareness that includes the awareness of poems, wins the day. The audience of verse is no longer readers but verse itself imagined, by way of a body, as auditors. Perhaps it's an odd consequence of Eliot's mythic description of old verse shouldered aside by new, or trembling at the impact, like the commotion in Purgatory when Statius goes up. I don't think this is bad or wrong, and in disenfranchised times it's like religion now talking to itself, confessing to its own witness, ventriloquist's dummy without the operator. What is it that Butterick has died, an event like a book coming out? Is any shift in our milieu now like publication? In a subtle way the old feelings don't apply.

—GERALD BURNS

GIL EVANS

Just when many jazz fans had come around to thinking that Gil Evans might just go on to live and work until age 100 or so, that great arranger died last year at age 76 in Cuernavaca, Mexico from peronitis. Although 76 years is just slightly past normal life expectancy on insurance actuary tables, it's Methuselah-like in the American jazz community—where many musicians don't live long enough to collect Social Security.

Gil Evans never gradually aged before his public as did Duke Ellington, whose late face could match the elder W.H. Auden wrinkle for wrinkle. He was always the "old man" in most of the musical endeavors he participated in—his early days in the bands of Skinnay Ennis and Bob Crosby only the early forgotten inches of biographical entry. Amazingly, he never had formal musical training, either as an arranger, composer or pianist. He was, however, blessed with an acute sense of the structure of

sound. "When I was a kid I could tell what kind of a car was coming with my back turned," Evans once told an interviewer in regard to his auditory skills. It was while growing up in Stockton, California that he first began listening to the jazz being broadcast on the radio. Shortly thereafter, he could identify the sound of the various bands of the early thirties before the announcer's identification.

This fascination for *sound*-in-itself became the cornerstone for all phases of Evans' career as an arranger. On the historic *Birth of The Cool* sessions, Chummy MacGregor's syrupy standard *Moondreams* is transformed into a blank canvas for Evans' arranging skills. Evans reduces the tempo to a near dirge (unusual for the late '40s), and creates a thick blend of the six horns used on the date. With no solos and only brief sections where one of the horns moves out of the ensemble to lead, *Moondreams* is at once a tour-de-force for the arranger Evans and a hint of the move that jazz would take in the march away from the 32 bar popular song which formed the basis of the form's improvisational matrix.

Evans' maturity and genuine color-blindness in matters of race made him a combined father-figure and musical elder among the musicians who worked along the 52nd Street jazz row. His apartment, a one-room basement flat on West 55th Street, became a combination crash pad and club house for the musicians who Evans befriended. "I left the door open and people came in and out all the time for the next couple of years," said Evans. Composer-arranger George Russell remembered the room as a sort of haven and refuge for musicians: "A very big bed took up a lot of the place; there was one big lamp, and a cat named Becky. . . .Inside, it was always very dark. The feeling of the room was timelessness."

The sense of timelessness that Russell saw in that apartment was a reflection of the man who paid the rent on it. His collaborations with Miles Davis, upon which Evans' reputation and acclaim mostly rest, resist categorization and the stain of the era it was recorded in. His arrangement of *Round Midnight* (Evans' credit not acknowledged in print until 1973) takes Thelonius Monk's oft-covered 1939 composition and creates a three-sectioned tone poem that becomes, in some ways, as much of the measure against which further interpretations are weighed as is any of the composer's many performances of the composition. Little can be added to the general praise and acclaim for the Davis/Evans ensemble projects—*Miles Ahead, Sketches of Spain* and *Porgy and Bess*—than what has already been said, though I will recommend the new digital version of *Miles Ahead* which has finally made the album available in *true* stereo and features alternate takes of certain tracks. These albums went far in legitimizing jazz for consumption in a white, upper middle class audience as Evans' complex ensemble arrangements removed the music from the spontaneity of the nightclub which the form is associated with. In

particular, *Sketches of Spain* (always slightly embarrassing to the hard-core jazz fan) was, for years, the supreme jazz album-for-the-non-jazz fan as well as a precursor to the less challenging music associated with the ECM and Windham Hill labels.

It must be pointed out, however, that Evans' role in these collaborations were primarily in fleshing out Davis' conceptions. Although much of his taste and stance is present in these recordings, they are, in the end, Miles Davis dates. In later years, Evans complained that he only received about five hundred dollars per each of these best-selling albums, the standard fee for arrangements. From his interviews and public statements one gets the sense of a man thoroughly in love with music but woefully short on any business acumen that would have allowed him to take control of his career. He recorded three brilliant albums for two small jazz labels in and about the time of his association with Davis—*Big Stuff* for Prestige and *New Bottle, Old Wine* and *Great Jazz Standards* for Pacific Jazz—but none of these efforts brought him remuneration in either monetary gain or attention for his particular vision of music. The two Pacific Jazz albums (available on compact disc) are demonstrative of Evans' deeply personal relation with the jazz tradition, as his arrangements and tune choices seem love letters to the wide community of players and diggers. Evans selected tunes that were rendered "mouldy fig" during the bop/dixieland wars of the early fifties *(King Porter Stomp, Davenport Blues, Struttin' With Some Barbecue)* and lovingly restores them to the classics they are regarded as now, which his incisive and witty arrangements that preference harmonic investigations over the stream of chords typifying post-bop procedure. Outside of these albums and the Davis arrangements, Evans' career during the fifties is rather shadowy. He made his money doing the odd arrangement for singers such as Johnny Mathis, Al Martino and Pearl Bailey and scoring television sound tracks. Perhaps, in an era dominated by the jazz combo and unable to financially sustain more than a handful of big jazz bands, no one ever figured how to best utilize his talents—including Evans.

The Impulse album *Out of The Cool,* recorded in 1960, is Evans' greatest single musical statement and one of the great records from the period. That title seems to reflect the music within, as it is unlike the lush orchestrations that made him famous. The album documents Evans' first working band, a group that had just finished playing a long engagement at Manhattan's Jazz Gallery. The music is dark and stripped down to the essentials. *La Nevada,* a four bar Evans composition, is built around the guitar of Ray Crawford (in his only significant musical performance) and the turbulent drumming of Elvin Jones. The theme is restated in fragments by various sections of the ensemble. No one performance so ably demonstrates a rather neglected aspect of Evans' skills as a group

leader—his ability to generate remarkable solos by musicians rarely regarded as improvisers of the first water, in this instance: Johnny Coles, Bud Johnson and Tony Studd. On the composition *Where Flamingoes Fly,* Evans creates an imaginative vehicle for trombonist Jimmy Knepper for solo of great emotion and compression. Evans' arrangement of an obscure Kurt Weill tune, *Bilbao,* will later become the model for Miles Davis' ground breaking composition *Bitches Brew.* Although the album's impact was somewhat obscured in the furor over the then-emerging "Free Jazz" school of the period, *Out of The Cool's* influence could be heard years later in such unlikely places as the rock bands Jefferson Airplane and Blood Sweat & Tears and the protean fusion group The Mahavishnu Orchestra.

Evans spent the sixties mostly out of the jazz scene. "For me, it was a question of a total life, a whole life, which has priority over any one of the things you do in the course of living," said Evans in regard to his withdrawal. The recent release of the complete 1964 *Individualism of Gil Evans* sessions (Verve 833 804-2, CD only) gives a fuller picture of Evans in this period. Included are three tunes from *Time of The Barracudas,* an unproduced Broadway play for which Davis and Evans wrote the score, his best-known composition *Las Vegas Tango* and another brilliant scoring of a Kurt Weill tune, *The Barbara Song.* The highlight of the album, however, is the unedited 14 minute version of Willie Dixon's *Spoonful,* the truncated version appearing on an obscure and poorly programmed album of Evans archival music. In a prelude to his later involvement with rock music, Evans creates a hypnotic version of this blues standard by building his arrangement around the riff that The Cream would make popular in the late sixties.

The last portion of Evans' life and musical career are both the best documented and least understood, especially by his older fans. For those raised on his classic Miles Davis collaborations, his rock-oriented 1971 Ampex date (his first rock-oriented) or 1972's excellent *Svengali* session (Atlantic) must have surely been another sign that the gods were indeed only mortal or, at the very least, only in it for the money. But for those somewhat less partisan to his early accomplishments, the move towards rock rhythms was less a break with Evans' past than a continuum with a musical vision that seemed intent on getting distance from the lush and "cool" orchestrations that his reputation was built upon. Any notion of "sell-out" is ludicrous in light of the fact that many of the late albums consisted of live recordings that Evans paid for himself and then sold to a record company. Ironically, the fact that Evans continued on with his exploration in electronics and rock rhythms during the rediscovery of acoustic jazz by young jazz musicians made him seem a bit retro in his outlook.

His near-involvement with Jimi Hendrix (Hendrix having died the day before a scheduled rehearsal) garnered him a degree of attention in the rock world, though his album of the late guitarist's compositions is the weakest effort in his long career (due, somewhat, to the fact that he only arranged two tunes). The recent re-release of the follow-up date *There Comes A Time* (RCA Bluebird 5783-2-RB, CD only) is revelation to both fans and detractors of his late music. What was a weak and unpublicized 1975 release has, through deletion, addition and restoration, become the major statement of that period. The masterwork is a twenty minute version of Bobby Troup's *Meaning of the Blues* (six minutes on the original release). Drawing upon a palette of instruments ranging from koto to synthesizer, Evans quite simply summarizes his career in a sweep of styles and emotions.

Evans managed to maintain a steady cast of repertory players in his last decades, which saw him performing at a steady Monday night gig at Sweet Basil in the West Village. Musicians such as Hiram Bullock, Arthur Blythe, Bob Stewart, George Lewis and Marvin Peterson gained attention playing in his big band; studio pros such as David Sanborn, Tom Malone and Howard Johnson got a chance to show off their jazz chops. Having seen the band play three times, I must admit that none of the numerous live albums that appeared in recent years came close to capturing the band at its full powers. Recommended, however, are the Public Theater recordings on Blackhawk and the Sweet Basil club recordings on Gramavision. It is also worth renting the VCR version of Julien Temple's *Absolute Beginners* for the Evans soundtrack, as the domestic version of the soundtrack album includes none of the instrumental pieces. Evans' robust arrangements of Charlie Mingus' *Better Get In Your Soul* and *Boogie Stop Shuffle* are typical of the homages that Evans paid in his music to the contemporaries who mattered to him most.

It seemed quite appropriate that the last album Evans approved for release was a series of duets with old friend Steve Lacy *(Paris Blues,* Owl 049). Though he only infrequently put on display his skills at piano, he was far from the inspired amateur he saw himself as. Though not to be confused with Bud Powell, he brought to the instrument the same degree of intelligence that molded his orchestrations. Though this album was referred to in the liner by Steve Lacy as a "work-in-progress" towards a larger project, it certainly evokes in the listener the numerous "sketching" sessions that Evans must have participated in towards the creation of his larger canvases.

Gil Evans insinuated himself into our musical consciousness without trying very hard, seemingly only interested in making music for his own pleasure. His "sound" has entered popular music, the once radical voicings and odd instrumentation becoming a working vocabulary even for

the mildest musical arrangers working away from the jazz idiom. His legacy seems the oddest in jazz—it is quite simply "his sound." He did not tour regularly with his own band until his late fifties and he did not feature his piano playing until a few months before his death (a solo recital from the mid-'70s remains unreleased). He wrote few tunes, and the ones he did write, like *La Nevada,* are essentially riffs. He continually downplayed his role in the history of jazz, almost to the point, sometimes, of making himself appear to be more of a hanger-on than one of the most brilliant musical minds of his generation. There is a ghost band now, led by his son Miles and maintaining the book and band roster that played in his last years. But, like all ghost bands, it exists both as a tribute to its deceased leader and a study in the futility of such an endeavor. I'd prefer to remember Evans through the records that documented his career and from the only time I met him—at a screening of John Sayles' *Brother from Another Planet,* in a theater on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. When the movie ended, I approached him and, in my best idiot-fan manner, told him how important his music was in my life. Surprised by being recognized and simultaneously embarrassed, he shook my hand, mumbled "thanks, man!" and walked up the theatre aisle, melding into the crowd heading for the exit to the snow-dusted streets of Broadway.

—JOEL LEWIS / 12.5.88

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

THORPE FEIDT lives in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where he is continuing his series of paintings, *The Ambiguities,* and writing a novel. JACKSON MAC LOW'S most recent book is *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books, 1986). In 1989, *Pieces o' Six: 33 poems in prose* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon) will appear. GARY SNYDER'S most recent book is *Left Out In The Rain: New Poems 1947–1985* (San Francisco: North Point, 1986). In a recent issue of *The Nation,* Stuart Klawans likened the experience of RON SILLIMAN'S poetry to "dragging your naked body through a bed of hot coals and broken glass." CLARK COOLIDGE'S most recent book is *At Egypt* (The Figures, 1988). DOMINICK DI MEO has been at work on a continuous series of sculptures and drawings, "Studies for Monuments," since 1979. He lives in New York City. C.D. WRIGHT'S most recent collection is *Further Adventures With You* (1986, Carnegie-Mellon). She teaches at Brown in Providence. CID CORMAN'S most recent collections include *And The Word* (Coffeehouse Press, 1987) and *Born Of A Dream* (Gnomon Press, 1988). L.S. ASEKOFF has completed a first volume of poems, "Dreams Of A Work." He lives in New York City. VIRGINIA HOOPER is an M.F.A. candidate at Columbia University with forthcoming work in *Southwest Review* and *American Letters And Commentary.* GERDA MEYER BERNSTEIN has appeared in many international exhibits, most recently in Germany at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Museum Bochum, and Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe. She will have a show at the Chicago Cultural Center this fall. Forthcoming publications by CHARLES BERNSTEIN include *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon) and *The Politics Of Poetic Form: Poetry And Public Policy* [editor] (Roof). RON PADGETT is currently working on a translation of the complete poems of Blaise Cendrars and a book about creative writing. Avenue B recently brought out his *Among The Blacks.* MEI-MEI BERSENBRUGGE'S latest book is *Empathy* (Station Hill); she is teaching in Vienna this spring. DAVID BROMIGE'S selected poems, *Desire* (Black Sparrow Press), received the Western States' Poetry Award for 1988. Later this year, Sun & Moon will publish his *An American Testament.* TED JENNER (born 1946, Dunedin, New Zealand) has published a volume of

poetry, *A Memorial Brass*. He has recently returned to New Zealand after an extended period of travel and study (in the field of Greek lyric poetry) in Europe. HAYDEN CARRUTH teaches in the graduate creative writing program at Syracuse University. His Selected Poetry was published in 1986. DOREN ROBBINS' most recent book is *Sympathetic Manifesto* (Perivale Press, 1987). He lives in Oregon. SEAN KILLIAN, whose work appeared in *Sulfur* #18, is now at work on a book-length manuscript and a one-act drama entitled "Planets In Love." THAD ZIOLKOWSKI is a graduate student in English Literature at Yale University. BARBARA JORDAN has had poems recently in *Ironwood* and *Anima*. She received a finalist award from the Massachusetts Artists Foundation this year. ANNA BIALOBRODA, who lives in New York City, will have one-person shows at The Queens Museum in New York, and at the Saxon-Lee Gallery in Los Angeles this year. JAMES IRBY, a Professor of Latin American Literature at Princeton, co-edited and co-translated Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* (New Directions and Modern Library). He is currently working on the poetry and poetics of José Lezama Lima. TYRUS MILLER, who lives in Palo Alto, California, is working on a poetic sequence entitled "Earthworks." DAVID KADLEC is working on an M.A. in English at the University of Chicago; his article on Paul Metcalf's *Apalache* appeared recently in *Sagetrieb*. KENT JOHNSON is the translator of *A Nation of Poets: Writings from the Poetry Workshops of Nicaragua* (West End). DAVID C.D. GANSZ is the author of *Animadversions* (Logres, 1986) and *Sin Tactics* (Woodbine Press, 1988). NATHANIEL TARN has just returned from a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy. A new book, *Seeing America First,* is due from Coffeehouse Press this spring. NATHANIEL MACKEY is the author of *Eroding Witness* (University of Illinois Press, 1985) and *Bedouin Hornbook* (Callaloo Fiction Series, 1986). GERALD BURNS'S latest book, *A Thing About Language,* is out soon from Southern Illinois University Press. His long poem, "The Passions of Being," is in *Temblor* #9. JOEL LEWIS is the editor of "Bluestones & Salt Hay," an anthology of contemporary New Jersey poetry, forthcoming from Rutgers University Press. He lives in Hoboken.

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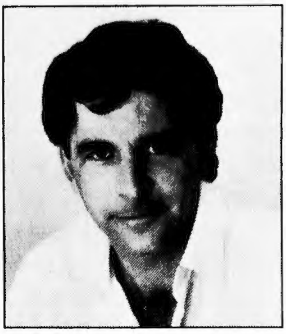

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